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Reflexive Structure, Intertextuality and Generic History

Hamburg University Press

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Abstract

This book investigates the narrative properties of the 19th-century verse novel. The genre grew out of Lord Byron's *Don Juan* and established itself in various European literatures, with famous examples such as Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. The proposed analysis is unique in the existing literature in defining the genre based on formal properties and in examining its exceptional, reflexive structure in detail. Apart from 19th-century texts, verse novels from contemporary literature are also included, and thus the connection between these two contexts is discussed for the first time extensively.

Zusammenfassung

Das Buch untersucht die narrativen Eigenschaften des Versromans des 19. Jahrhunderts. Das Genre basiert auf Lord Byrons *Don Juan* und hat sich in verschiedenen europäischen Literaturen etabliert, mit berühmten Beispielen wie Puschkins *Eugen Onegin*. Die vorgeschlagene Analyse ist indem sie das Genre auf einer formalen Basis definiert und dessen außergewöhnliche, reflexive Erzählstruktur detailliert untersucht, auf der gegenwärtigen wissenschaftlichen Basis einzigartig. Neben den Texten aus dem 19. Jahrhundert werden auch Versromane aus der Gegenwartsliteratur berücksichtigt und damit die Verbindung zwischen diesen zwei Kontexten zum ersten Mal ausführlich diskutiert.

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A note on the texts and translations

The quotations in the present dissertation are taken from the editions given in the list of primary sources. Whenever possible, a critical edition was used: in the case of Byron's works, this is the one edited by Jerome J. McGann. Regarding the Hungarian texts, more than one critical edition was available in some cases: when there was a choice, I always took the newer edition. For many of the authors discussed here, no critical edition exists (this is obviously so with contemporary authors): in these cases, I took either the first edition or a philologically accurate and annotated edition. The two exceptions in this respect are Balázs Szálinger and Ferenc Juhász, as I took the first edition for each containing a synthesis of their narrative poetic works. Finally, in two cases (József Kiss and Gyula Reviczky) I used a further edition in addition to the default one as the latter (the critical edition in Reviczky's case and the first edition in József Kiss's case) did not contain some relevant parts of the text discussed in my investigation. Unless marked otherwise, however, the quotations were taken from the default edition in both cases.

The precise locus is given after each quotation. This includes the number or name of the larger unit (canto, chapter etc.) and either the stanza numbers or the line numbers. An alternative solution would have been to refer to the page numbers of the particular edition used here; while this would indeed make it easier for the reader to find the quotation in its original context in the given edition, the same would be considerably more difficult if another edition is used (for instance, if a newer critical edition should appear in the future).

The main text of the dissertation includes the texts in the original, followed by translations. Only few texts have been translated into English: in fact, this applies only to three texts of Sándor Petőfi (the references are given in the list of primary sources). Consequently, most of the translations are mine: these aim at approximating the original as much as possible rather than at creating an artistic effect. Naturally, there are occasionally some word games that cannot be translated properly; these are explained in addition in detail.

The titles of the Hungarian works are always given in the original, and the first mentions in a section always include the translation in square brackets. Many of these title translations are taken from existing translations (even if a given work has never been translated in its entirety, several excerpts may exist in translation), which are referenced in the footnotes upon the first mentions. To my knowledge, the most complete and up-to-date anthology of Hungarian poetry is the one edited by Adam Makkai. While the translations of the quotations used in my dissertation do not appear in this anthology, at least a significant number of the title translations could be taken from there; hence, this work is also listed among the primary sources. In line with the general aims of using the original forms consistently, as far as possible, the names of the characters have not been translated either: if necessary, some explanatory remarks are added for clarification; for instance, in the case of character-revealing names.

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1

Introduction

The aim of the present dissertation is to examine the Hungarian verse novel, and, related to this, the question how the verse novel can be defined as a genre. The theoretical framework underlying this study is partly defined by the fundamental insights of structuralist narrative theories (such as Genette 1972, 1973), and partly by postmodern literary theories in terms of their ways of dealing with the self-reflexive and intertextual qualities of various texts. I will approach the history of the genre from a narratological perspective. On the one hand, I assume that the narrative properties of a given text, and especially the positioning of the narrator, constitute a structure that can be understood within the text as a closed system. This structure can dynamically change as the text proceeds linearly; in addition, the text defined by this structure is naturally related to other texts and genres. On the other hand, certain features of reflexivity and intertextuality can become inherent properties of a genre, and as such, they appear as integral constituents of the narrative structure characteristic of the closed system, and grammaticalise as formal properties thereof.

At first sight, the verse novel as a choice may seem to be a specific and narrow topic, especially because I will primarily focus on the 19th-century Hungarian verse novel. However, it is important to stress that providing an answer to several questions related to this topic is relevant in terms of the history of other genres, the theory of genre history, postmodern verse narratives, and not least, in terms of narrative theory.

Partly due to the divergent nature of the topic, a considerable number of analyses concerning the Hungarian verse novel is available; the most important definitely being the monograph by Imre (1990), but earlier and later works such as Dávidházi (1974), Szajbély (2002) and Z. Kovács (2008) should also be mentioned. Regarding the history of genres belonging to narrative poetry, the literature devoted to the mocks epic is especially important, such as Kiss (1978) and Robertson (2009).

In the following, I will review the most dominant narrative and generic properties of the verse novel, before briefly summarising the most important topics and problems to be discussed in my dissertation.

1.1 The genre of the verse novel

The verse novel was an important genre of Hungarian literature in the second half of the 19th century, with examples like János Arany's *Bolond Istók* [Stephen the Fool] from 1850/1873, László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages] from 1872 or János Vajda's *Találkozások* [Encounters] from 1877. Although most of the relevant texts are from the 1870s, there are several examples from the 1880s, such as Gyula

Werner's *Az ő regénye* [His Romance] from 1884, and from the 1890s, such as Károly Szomory's *Pál Pál* [Pál Pál] from 1894. In addition, we find examples even from the beginning of the 20th century, like József Kiss's *Legendák a nagyapámról* [About my Grandfather] from 1910, and Jenő Dsida's *A tükör előtt* [In front of the Mirror] from 1936. Apart from prototypical verse novels and/or ones generally considered as such, various works can conditionally be regarded as verse novels, such as Endre Ady's *Margita élni akar* [Margita Wants to Live] from 1912. Further, even in the middle of the 20th century, many texts were strongly related to the genre, including Lőrinc Szabó's cycle *Tücsökzene* [Cricket Music] from 1947. Finally, it is important to mention that the verse novel reappeared in Hungarian literature at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, with examples like János Térey's *Paulus* [Paulus] from 2001.

Hence, the verse novel is well-established in Hungarian literature. At the same time, the genre is not easy to define. This is so especially because even though the Hungarian verse novel had been primarily inspired by international (English and Russian) examples, the verse novel as a genre was actually established within the context of Hungarian literature, and it can be interpreted within or, in relation to its original sources, through this context. In this way, the verse novel is a special product of Hungarian literature not only when taken as a primary literary phenomenon but also as a concept of literary history.

The term "verse novel" goes back to Pushkin, who defined his *Eugene Onegin* as such ("Роман в Стихах") in the subtitle. In Russian literature, the term is certainly idiosyncratic inasmuch as Pushkin's text is primarily related to the prose novel regarding both its antecedents and its later impact, and the Russian verse novel was not established as a genre. By contrast, several Hungarian verse novels explicitly use the term "verse novel" (Hungarian: "verses regény"), which ultimately became a genre designator in literary criticism.

Apart from Pushkin's text, another significant model for Hungarian literature was Lord Byron, especially his *Don Juan*; in English literature, similarly to Russian literature, the verse novel does not appear as a genre (apart from texts written at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries). Byron's *Don Juan* belongs to the rather heterogeneous group of Romantic verse narratives (taken in the sense of Fischer 1991) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, it is related to the mock epic, a well-established genre of English literature. Hence, *Don Juan* is classified into various genres (if at all) in the Anglo-Saxon and international literature: it is mostly regarded as a "mock epic" (or as a "mock-heroic poem", a looser term regarding genre specification) or as a "verse narrative", which refers to a generic supercategory. It is designated as a "verse novel" (or occasionally as a "novel in verse") primarily if discussed in relation to cross-cultural examples such as Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* or Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*. However, even in these cases, it is questionable whether "verse

novel" is actually used as a proper generic term or rather as an umbrella term for texts which can hardly be classified into established genres, and which have shared properties relevant for the given discussion. Byron had several followers in various national literatures in Europe, and *Don Juan* had a significant impact as well; yet Hungarian literature is unique in that the verse novel was established as a genre. On the one hand, there are several examples for verse novel; on the other hand, the individual texts often unambiguously present Byron's and Pushkin's relevan texts as generic antecedents.

Hence, from the perspective of the Hungarian verse novel, it seems obvious that the genre is interpreted as a phenomenon of world literature, regarding either the primary texts or literary tradition. Furthermore, the verse novel is distinct from other verse narratives that are similarly difficult to classify into genres and/or are similar to the novel to some extent. In this connection, it is important to point out that the term "verse novel" as a genre designator refers to the texts written in the Byronic-Pushkinian tradition; hence, its meaning is not the same as a "novel in verse". As mentioned above, both terms occur in the Anglo-Saxon literature, yet "verse novel" is favourable as it conveys the idea better that the complex genre designator is not compositional. Note that while in Hungarian literary tradition, the term "verses regény" is potentially ambiguous between the two English terms, it is nevertheless used almost exclusively for Byronic–Pushkinian verse novels. The genre of the verse novel does not refer to novels that happen to have been written in verse. Instead, it refers to verse narratives that differ and should be differentiated from previously existing genres of narrative poetry (such as the epic), and which are relatively close to the (prose) novel in certain respects (primarily in their topics, or in some formal properties such as being divided into chapters instead of cantos). In this sense, the designation "novel" is not so much an indicator of inherent closeness to prose novels (positive definition) but rather a gesture of alienation from other, canonised genres of narrative poetry (negative definition) and a move towards a fairly unbound form (which is in this respect indeed similar to the novel).

Of course, this does not exclude the possibility of verse novels showing similarities to contemporary prose novels in several respects; yet these similarities can be detected rather on the topical level. An example is the revolution of 1848 (and the following war of independence) as a central topic in Hungarian literature, but also simply the fact that verse novels tend to depict the contemporary world and its problems, as do several types of the 19th-century novel. In addition, Hungarian verse novels often explicitly take a critical stance towards contemporary prose novels (or certain groups thereof); hence, investigating the complex relationship between the verse novel and the prose novel would naturally be an interesting quest. However, in terms of its for-

mal properties, the verse novel primarily stems from previous genres of narrative poetry, and it can be interpreted as a literary response to those. Conversely, there are no prose texts in Hungarian literature that could be related to the verse novel in an analogous way to how the works of Sterne and Fielding can be related to Byron's texts. For this reason, I will restrict myself to verse narratives when examining the generic connections of the verse novel in my dissertation; the investigation of the relation to the novel would be well beyond the scope of the present study.

Due to the unboundedness of verse novel's form, it is difficult to find properties based on which the definition of the genre could be constructed. In many cases, the hero is disillusioned, he[1] does not find his place in society, and when it comes to critical situations, he makes decisions that essentially ruin his life. Verse novels can be critical towards contemporary society and certain conventions, too; in addition, criticism extends to literary genres and conventions. The tone is typically ironic and partly colloquial; the narrator and narration are foregrounded and thematised. I will argue that the genre of the verse novel can be and should be defined primarily along narratological-formal terms, and several properties of the genre directly follow from the structure based on reflections.

1.2 The problems to be discussed

In Chapter 2, the major narrative properties of the 19th-century Hungarian verse novel will be discussed, with the aim of providing a largely uniform picture of the rather heterogeneous material constituted by verse novels written in the second half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. Apart from covering common properties, the analysis must allow for the variation observed among the individual texts, and it must be able to condition this variation adequately. In addition to merely describing the narrative structure characteristic of (Hungarian) verse novels, I will address the question why the generic definition of the verse novel should be based on narratological grounds. In this sense, the discussion of the narrative properties of the verse novel does not so much involve characterising an a priori defined genre from cewrtain aspects, but rather defining the essence of that genre, in a strictly descriptive sense. Hence, the aim of the proposal is not only to distinguish texts that can be considered verse novels from those belonging to other

[1] The hero is in almost all verse novels a male character (not only in Hungarian literature); hence, for the sake of simplicity, I will use the third-person single masculine pronouns when referring to the hero. The same applies to the narrator, who is in most cases clearly identifiable as a male person (partly due to his marked connections to the male hero and the male biographical author).

genres, but also to relate marginal texts to central properties along the lines of formal criteria. Naturally, the genre of the verse novel can be approached from several perspectives; for this very reason, I will restrict myself to discussing questions to which the answers are indispensable for an adequate description of the genre of the verse novel and the narrative properties thereof.

In the second half of the 19th century, one of the most important genres of Hungarian literature was the verse novel, culminating in works such as László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages] and János Arany's *Bolond Istók* [Stephen the Fool]. Verse narratives had previously existed as well, yet the verse novel in the Byronic-Pushkinian sense was characteristic specifically for this period, and primarily for the 1870s. While the individual texts may show considerable differences, the group of texts in question can be relatively well delimited.

At the same time, even though delimitation is possible, approaching the history of the verse novel is not straightforward. On the one hand, the genre is difficult to define: the texts belonging to that genre are written in verse, they have a narrative, they are primarily related to the contemporary world regarding their topics, and they show digressions from the main story line. Concerning thematic elements, however, the fact that many texts show the same properties is not so much the specificity of the genre but rather the consequence of the genre's ability to accommodate topics that were of primary importance in the literature of the given period. A prime example for this is the revolution of 1848 (and the subsequent war of independence, which is thematised in several Hungarian verse novels. However, this topic is obviously not an idiosyncratic property of the verse novel, as it is addressed in poetry and in prose novels more generally, such as in Mór Jókai's *A kőszívű ember fiai* [The Baron's Sons].

One of the most important properties of the Byronic-Pushkinian verse novel is the foregrounding of the narrator. This results in the backgrounding of the narration of the story to varying degrees, in favour of discussions about the story (diegetic level) and the way the story is presented (extradiegetic level), which is closely related to the issue of genre parody. In addition, the dominant position of the narrator allows him to digress in various ways, thus covering a wide range of topics within a single text. The main question in this respect is how reflections on the diegetic and extradiegetic levels of the text define its structure: on the one hand, the question is to what extent this structure becomes visible; on the other hand, it must be clarified whether there are changes that can be observed within a single text as the narration proceeds.

The dialogical nature of the texts and to the thematisation of narrative structure raisethe question how these properties are related to the reader and to the reading process: in many verse novels, the narrator seems to be involved in a dialogue with the reader. There are several variants, and the reader's figure is elaborated and specified to varying degrees; the narrator has a number of ways of constructing the

reader's character in the text, according to which the reader may be assigned linguistic presence. The dialogues with the reader may vary in terms of their fictitiousness not only on a linguistic level but also in how specific the reader becomes. The reader may be quite general (and as such applicable to any of the actual readers), specified to some extent (for instance, only a group of readers is addressed), or specified (for instance, the reference is made to a given person outside of the text).

Finally, yet importantly, it must be highlighted that the reflections in the text and the thematisation of questions concerning the genre explicitly place an individual text in an intertextual space. This intertextual space not only relates the text to other texts (that are either fully identifiable or can be limited to a group sharing certain typical features or generic properties), but it also appears as a thematised element in essentially any verse novel.

In Chapter 2, I will argue that the narrative features of the verse novel are structural properties with which one can distinctively describe the genre. This narrative structure is built around the frame constituted by reflections, which target both the diegetic and the extradiegetic level on the one hand, and which may involve a lower or higher degree of distance from the specific text on the other hand. By combining the two perspectives in a matrix, a model can be created in which reflections fall into four basic categories; furthermore, references to the linguistic and literary properties of the text fit into this frame just as well as dialogues with the reader.

Chapter 3 aims at providing an overview of questions related to Byron's verse novel (or verse novels) and its antecedents in English literature. Namely, the development of the verse novel as a genre can ultimately be traced back to Byron's work, which is why Byron is of key importance in understanding the Hungarian verse novel. On the one hand, Byron was an important antecedent of the Hungarian verse novel, either directly or indirectly. On the other hand, Byron's works had their antecedents as well; the dissimilarities not only help understand the way the verse novel differs from other genres, but they may also reveal what kind of literary context is necessary and/or sufficient for the appearance and eventual spread of the verse novel. The fact that Byron's *Don Juan* is considered as the first verse novel in Hungarian literary tradition raises important questions which would hold true even if *Don Juan* were not a significant work, merely because *Don Juan* is interpreted as the first instance of a genre. There are two major perspectives from which its "firstness" is highly relevant; accordingly, the questions that arise fall into two major categories as well.

On the one hand, *Don Juan* is the beginning of something new with respect to an already existing literary tradition. Concerning this, it is important to examine its exact antecedents in English literature and to evaluate how *Don Juan* (and the verse novel in general) differs from these; that is, why and from which point it is justifiable to talk about a truly novel genre.

The verse novel is essentially a hybrid; hence, there is a wide spectrum of antecedents to be expected. There are two basic directions: the various genres of narrative poetry (including the mock epic) and prose novels. Both have a long tradition in English literature, and both show narrative traits that are employed in verse novels, including *Don Juan*, as well; for instance, in the case of the mock epic, the mocking of epic conventions is an evident example. Regarding the antecedents, not only preceding periods should be considered but also the works of Byron's contemporaries. A fundamental question as to that is whether *Don Juan* can be considered the first verse novel because it was markedly different from other contemporary verse narratives or whether it is the first verse novel precisely because it arrived at different conclusions for largely similar literary questions. In this respect, I will also examine the issue of how *Don Juan* relates to Byron's other verse narratives, primarily to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

On the other hand, treating *Don Juan* as a beginning also implies that there is some sort of continuation, yet it is clear that the verse novel as a genre is virtually missing in English literature (apart from the renewal of the genre at the end of the 20th century). Due to byron's impact, texts to be considered verse novels appeared in other literatures as well; however, these examples are essentially restricted to a single author in each case, as can be observed in Russian literature. By contrast, the genre gained special importance in Hungarian literature, which raises the question what set of conditions was necessary for establishing the genre in Hungarian literature and why this was not the case of English literature.

At the same time, this also means that, somewhat simplistically, *Don Juan* was not only the first but also the last verse novel within the context of English literature. However, this statement is paradox except when interpreted within the context of the verse novel as a genre of world literature (hence as a result of intercultural interactions). When considering English literature only, *Don Juan* must be related to some other genre or group of texts from which it differs enough to be the only one to qualify as a verse novel from the perspective of world literature. If there is such a group of texts, the afterlife of text types belonging there is also a relevant question regarding the status of *Don Juan*.

While all these considerations can be applied generally in terms of genre history, it is important to examine the specifically narratological aspects in each case. A narratological viewpoint is vitally important not only because the verse novel can be defined along narratological terms, but also because the question why *Don Juan* does not have a continuation in English literature could be answered based on the structure characteristic of verse novels. Namely, it is a tenuous explanation that Byron became a quasi-diabolical figure and that the reception of *Don Juan* was not especially positive. Moreover, *Don Juan*, as will be shown, did have some impact on

English narrative poetry, even though this impact is indeed negative in the sense that *Don Juan* primarily contributed to the diminishing of verse narratives characteristic at the beginning of the 19th century.

Considering all this, I will show in Chapter 3 that *Don Juan*, as well as Byron's narrative poetry in general, can and should primarily be interpreted in the context of the Romantic verse narrative in English literature. Naturally, the Romantic verse narrative is not to be taken as a genre but rather as a heterogeneous group of various verse narratives that aimed at replacing the epic between 1790 and 1830. In my analysis, I will argue that *Don Juan* primarily differs from Byron's other verse narratives in terms of its narrative structure, andthat its markedly reflexive nature constitutes a qualitative difference from other texts like those by, for instance, Sir Walter Scott. The narrative structure constituted a negative answer to the feasibility of the epic, and in this way, *Don Juan* can be considered an endpoint of the English Romantic verse narrative. At the same time, the narrative structure of *Don Juan* fully conforms to what can observed in the case of Hungarian verse novels; hence, treating *Don Juan* as the first novel is indeed justifiable from the perspective of Hungarian literary history.

Regarding the issue of the verse novel and its internal antecedents, the relationship between the mock epic and the verse novel is of primary importance. This issue will be addressed in Chapter 4 in detail, whereby the primary goal is to answer the question how examining the narrative properties of the respective genres can help distinguish the two on formal grounds. The mock epic is namely an important antecedent of the verse novel on the one hand, and both genres markedly reflect on the classical epic and parody it on the other hand. The question is, therefore, to what extent the parody attested in verse novels is different, and which (primarily narrative) properties must be present or absent for the text to qualify either as a mock epic or as a verse novel. Examining the relation between the two genres is relevant in terms of both English literature and Hungarian literature: in English literature, Alexander Pope had the most significant impact, while in Hungarian literature the works of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz may be regarded as potential antecedents. Apart from the existence and degree of impact, the question arises to what extent the two genres were perceived as different: while Hungarian verse novels were not regarded as mock epics, Byron's *Don Juan* was not only treated as a mock epic by contemporaries (among other designators), but even present-day literary criticism also frequently uses this label for *Don Juan*.

Hence, the relationship between the verse novel and the mock epic is highly interesting primarily due to the inherent similarities between the two, and separating them is crucial because, apart from theoretical reasons, the mock epic is also an important generic antecedent of the verse novel. Besides general considerations, these circumstances raise specifically narratological problems, and, if the verse novel can

primarily be defined on narratological grounds, its differentiation from the mock epic should be carried out accordingly. What this means for the theory is that if the narrative properties inherently characteristic of the verse novels are indeed suitable for structurally defining the verse novel, the mock epic (or any other genre) should not show the same properties or at least not to a significant degree.

The fundamental question is thus how far the mock epic is reflexive in comparison to the verse novel, and to what extent the narrator becomes foregrounded. This naturally applies to both the diegetic and the extradiegetic level. In connection with the extradiegetic level, the issue of reflecting on other genres must also be addressed. The mock epic is by definition in constant interaction with the classical, serious epic, but this does not necessarily involve the appearance of explicit reflections: the text evokes the epic for the reader simply by adhering to or imitating certain formal conventions and this is especially true for contemporary readers highly familiar with the genre of the epic. Therefore, the difference between the verse novel and the mock epic must lie in how instances of mere evocation and explicit reflection are carried out, as well as in the ratio of the two.

Finally, the differences among the individual national literatures must also be taken into consideration; that is, what the narrative structure of already existing mock epics was like back then, and how well these texts were embedded in the given literary context (especially in terms of their narrative structure). In this respect, I will concentrate on the differences and similarities between the English and the Hungarian literary contexts.

In Chapter 4, by examining the mock epics of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, Sándor Petőfi and János Arany, I will show that the Hungarian mock-epic tradition was a potential antecedent of verse novels in several respects, and this tradition was potentially closer to the narrative structure characteristic of the verse novel than Pope's epic poetry was to Byron's in English literature. On the other hand, *Don Juan* was known in Hungarian literary tradition already in the first half of the 19th century, hence the fact that the verse novel appeared markedly later can be attributed primarily to the lack of appropriate antecedents. In my analysis, I will argue that the causes can be traced back to the status of the individual genres. While the epic was a central ambition of Hungarian literature in the 19th century, genres mocking the epic were assigned a marginal role, and their importance grew only with a change of the literary field, when the verse novel as a complex literary response became a canonical genre.

Chapter 5 compirses a further discussion of internal antecedents, focussing on the question which features present in 19th-century Hungarian verse narratives may have served as antecedents for the verse novel in terms of narrative structure. On the one hand, antecedents are important because verse novels may have made

use of some of their elements (potentially reflecting on these); on the other hand, the resemblance of verse novels to their antecedents may have contributed to the narrative structure of verse novels not being alien at the time of their appearance. Without being exhaustive, the chapter will naturally examine a few authors and works only as they were all important in 19th-century Hungarian literature; examining the entirety of the relations among the genres would be an impossible quest. I will primarily concentrate on connections whose existence is more or less evident, and I will focus on the narratological aspects of these connections, which have gained relatively little attention in the relevant literature so far.

Examining the poetry of Sándor Kisfaludy, Mihály Vörösmarty and Sándor Petőfi, I will argue that, except for the mock epic, there were no antecedents in Hungarian epic poetry that could have substantially fostered the appearance of the verse novel. The relevant texts either do not show the narrative properties characteristic of the verse novel or they do so only to a limited degree, and as such, they do not constitute a network valid for the whole text, which would define its narrative structure. In most cases, narrators step forward in a way reminiscent of lyric poetry and they are no examples of clearly identifiable characters of an author-narrator; moreover, narrators appearing as authors often conform to archetypical roles of the poet and/or those typical of Romantic poetry. Thus, the internal antecedents of the Hungarian verse novel belong to a wide range of genres of epic poetry. However, even when taking the cumulative significance of these texts, they are mainly important for establishing a wider literary context io which the verse novel appearing later could be embedded.

Finally, Chapter 6 of the dissertation addresses the question of the afterlife of the verse novel; that is, the genre's fate after its 19th-century appearance. Naturally, this topic is (again) far larger than could be dealt with in detail. Regarding the Hungarian verse novel, it can be established that the genre was characteristic of the second half of the 19th century, while the number of examples gradually diminished at the beginning of the 20th century. Moreover, these later examples became also more and more different from prototypical verse novels. In most part of the 20th century, no verse novels appeared; this fact, of course, does not exclude the possibility of verse narratives showing closer similarity to the genre. Finally, the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century again show the appearance of texts in Hungarian literature that can be regarded as verse novels in the sense of the definition based on narrative structure. In addition to contemporary Hungarian verse novels, those in other literatures should be considered as well, whereby English-language texts have primary importance.

Hence, a fundamental question is what kind of literary tradition contemporary Hungarian verse novels are based on, and how significant internal antecedents are

(with particular attention to the 19th-century verse novel), and how important intercultural connections have become. In general, I will argue that, to a considerable degree, contemporary Hungarian verse novels rely on the 19th-century tradition, notably on its intercultural extension; that is, not only on texts written in Hungarian. Most generic connections are established via explicit reflections, hence, they ultimately stem from the fact that present-day verse novels regard the 19th-century verse novel as a generic antecedent and part of literary tradition. In this sense, the criterion of reflexivity can be applied not only on the level of the individual texts but also on the level of the entire genre.

In addition to contemporary Hungarian verse novels, I will examine some 20th-century literary texts in detail which can be related to the verse novel to some extent and/or which show certain dominant properties of the epic poetry of that period. One well-known example is Lőrinc Szabó's *Tücsökzene* [Cricket Music], but Ágnes Nemes Nagy's *Három történet* [Three Stories] belongs here, too. Regarding these texts, I will show that their strongly lyrical character (which fits well into the oeuvres of the respective poets) hampers the kind of reflexive structure observed in verse novels. On the other hand, epic narratives in the period could move not only in the direction of lyric poetry; a markedly different tendency is detectable in Ferenc Juhász's epic poetry. His mock epic *A jégvirág kakasa* [The Rooster of the Frostwork] is of concern, which is related to the verse novel due to its generic specification, since it evokes the probably most important generic antecedent. In my analysis, I will argue that Ferenc Juhász's text not only continues the preceding (Hungarian) mock-epic tradition, as shown by its relatedness to the relevant works of Sándor Petőfi and Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, but it also applies a reflexive structure that is significantly closer to the narrative features of 19th-century verse novels. Thus, one may expect the (subversive) structural continuation of the genre of the verse novel.

However, the real continuation of the verse novel is tied to the appearance of contemporary verse novels since in this case, no single isolated text can be found but several works that are central in contemporary Hungarian literature. On the one hand, it appears that epic poetry again enjoys a central status at the beginning of the 21st century in Hungarian literature, resulting in a heterogeneous group of texts. On the other hand, the genre-specific re-appearance of the verse novel can be observed; hence, many works show precisely those reflexive traits based on which the verse novel can be defined. In addition, the contemporary Hungarian verse novel has a new literary antecedent, namely the 19th-century verse novel.

Naturally, cross-references can be observed among 19th-century verse novels: hence the references to the relevant texts of Byron and Pushkin. These references indicate that the given Hungarian text belongs to the same genre as these, and the intercultural concept of the verse novel as a genre is created this way. Contemporary

verse novels, however, regard the 19th-century verse novel (including Hungarian verse novels)as a generic antecedent; in this sense, the 19th-century verse novel becomes an imitated and paraphrased theme, in a way reminiscent of how the 19th-century verse novel related to its own generic antecedents. One of the texts most reflected on is *Eugene Onegin*: it is referred to by János Térey's *Paulus* [Paulus] and *Protokoll* [Protocol] as well as Dániel Varró's *Túl a Maszat-hegyen* [Beyond Mountain Smut]. Apart from international antecedents, Hungarian literary tradition is also reflected on: István Géher's *Polgár Istók* [Stephen the Bourgeois], for instance, refers to János Arany's *Bolond Istók* in its title and several other respects.

In addition to contemporary Hungarian verse novels, I will address the issue of several English-language verse narratives appearing at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries that can be considered verse novels or are related to the genre (as defined in the present dissertation). Many of these refer to the Byronic tradition, primarily to *Don Juan*: this can be observed in Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* and Anthony Burgess's *Byrne*. The latter is quite explicit in its reference to Byron, as in this case the narrator compares his own poetic qualities and aims at those of Byron in the prologue. Hence, the Byronic verse novel gains the status of a genre in English-language literature as well, even though it constitutes a much looser group than the contemporary Hungarian verse novel (which in turn constitutes a looser group than the 19th-century Hungarian verse novel). Still, it can be concluded that the genre, which appeared in the context of world literature and which should be interpreted in this context, is undoubtedly a phenomenon of world literature in the postmodern period.



The narrative characteristics of the verse novel

In this chapter, I will present the major characteristics of the 19th-century Hungarian verse novel, with the chief aim of providing a conceivably unified picture of the rather heterogenic material that the verse novels appearing in the second half of the 19th century and partially at the beginning of the 20th century constitute. Furthermore, the goal is to provide a model that not only captures the common properties of these verse novels but also allows for, and appropriately conditions, the variation attested among the individual texts. Apart from merely presenting an analysis for the narrative structure that can be observed in (Hungarian) verse novels, I will demonstrate that the genre definition of the verse novel must primarily follow from narrative terms. In this sense, the investigation of the narrative characteristics of the verse novel does not involve the examination of an a priori understood genre along the lines of certain theoretical concerns, but it rather refers to the very definition of the genre, naturally in a strictly descriptive sense. The proposed analysis is thus not only suitable for distinguishing texts that qualify as verse novels from others that do not, but also for differentiating texts that only marginally represent the genre from ones that are clearly central on purely formal grounds. Since the following investigation relies on previous work devoted to the genre and/or the narrative characteristics of the verse novel, I will summarise the findings of these first.

2.1 Earlier accounts

The genre of the verse novel could naturally be approached from several different perspectives; in what follows, I will highlight some questions only that need to be answered in order to provide an adequate description for the genre of the verse novel and for the narrative structure thereof.

It is a common assumption that the verse novel was an important genre in the second half of the 19th century in Hungarian literature, represented by prominent examples such as *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages][2] by László Arany or *Bolond Istók* [Stephen the Fool] by János Arany. Verse narratives are attested in preceding periods as well, but the verse novel, taken in the Byronic-Pushkinian sense, is characteristic of this period, primarily of the 1870s. Even though it has both antecedents and later appearances, the pool of texts, which is far from homogenous, can be defined relatively well.

Approaching the verse novel from the perspective of genre history constitutes a rather complex set of problems: one obviously has to consider texts written in verse which

2 The translation of the title follows J. G. Nichols's translation of the excerpt of László Arany's verse novel, as it appears in Adam Makkai's anthology.

are epic and narrative in nature, their topic is primarily related to the contemporary world, and they contain a number of digressions alongside the main thread of events. There are naturally several thematic elements that could be enumerated, being characteristic either of the genre, or of its Hungarian form. However, the fact that many texts are concerned with the same topical issues is not primarily the manifestation of some inherent property of the genre, but is rather the consequence of the genre being suitable for accommodating the topics that were of particular interest in the contemporary literature. To mention just one example, several Hungarian verse novels address the issue of the revolution of 1848 and the subsequent war of independence; this, however, is not restricted to verse novels but can be observed, for instance, in prose novels as well, such as Mór Jókai's well-known work *A kőszívű ember fiai* [The Baron's Sons][3].

An important property of the Byronic-Pushkinian verse novel is the emphatic foregrounding of the narrator, in addition to which storytelling is shifted to the background (to varying degrees) in favour of talking about the story, or even narration, which is an issue closely related to genre parody. The narrator's superposition allows him to digress from time to time, resulting in a rich variation of topics even within a single text. The most compelling issue in this respect is how the reflections on the diegetic and extradiegetic levels of the text define their structure. On the one hand, it needs to be examined how much of this structure is visible; on the other hand, the question is whether changes can be observed during the course of narration within individual texts.

The dialogical nature of the text and the thematised status of the narrative structure also raise the issue of how all these features are related to the reader and the reading process: in several verse novels, the narrator creates the impression that he is directly talking to the reader (and vice versa). This may have several variants, depending on the degree to which the reader is personified and specified, and on how the narrator constructs the figure of the reader textually; that is, to what extent the figure of the reader is assigned a linguistic trajectory of its own. On the other hand, the variation in the degree of fictitiousness concerning the dialogues with the reader is not restricted to the level of linguistic realisation. There is considerable variation whether the figure of the reader is quite general (and as such can be set to interplay with any actual reader), or specified to some degree (e.g., it refers only to a certain group of readers), or fully specified (e.g., it addresses someone in the external world).

In addition, the reflections in the text and the question of the genre explicitly make the text intertextual. This does not merely mean establishing some connection between the given text and other texts (which are either fully identifiable, or can be understood as a set of texts sharing typological features or generic requirements), but the very connection constitutes a thematised element in any verse novel.

3 The translation of the title follows Percy Favor Bicknell's 1900 translation (Boston: Colonial Press).

2.1.1 Modality, composition, metrics – Dávidházi (1974)

Concentrating primarily on Pál Gyulai's *Romhányi* [Romhányi], Dávidházi (1974: 497) sketches three fundamental ways of approaching the generic properties of the verse novel, namely modality, composition, and metrics.

Modality essentially refers to the (personal) relationship of the narrator towards what he is to say, which is characterised by alienation and by creating distance in verse novels (Dávidházi 1974: 497). A typical example for this is that the narrator never fully (maximally partially) identifies with the behaviour patterns depicted: this can be observed in László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages], as argued by Dávidházi (1974: 497); see also Németh (1970: 98–99, 108) and Németh (1971: 195–196). By contrast, even though Gyulai's *Romhányi* is characterised by alienating gestures throughout most of the text, the ending sees a change: distance is abandoned on arriving at an issue particularly important for Gyulai, and a standpoint previously seen merely as a possibility is interpreted as an absolute truth above all potential alternative standpoints (Dávidházi 1974: 497).

The formal properties mentioned above are closely related to the appearance of the moral-ethical dimension as well. In this connection, Dávidházi (1974: 497) notes that the authors of verse novels generally create the impression of not believing in the possibility of making the world better, or in an existing role of the arts in society. Partly due to this matter, they create the impression of a work written only en passant and being an example of a certain carelessness. The exact opposite can be observed in *Romhányi*: the aesthetic aspect is throughout accompanied by the ethic aspect, primarily resulting in the conclusion that the narrator fundamentally believes in a harmonic, absolute system of values, thus overwriting the ironic aspect, as opposed to the plurality and disharmony typically attested in verse novels (see Dávidházi 1974: 497–499).

Regarding the second major point (composition), Dávidházi (1974: 499) emphasises the importance of digressions and mentions three different degrees. In Byron's verse novels, *Don Juan* and *Childe Harold*, digressions are so fundamental that the main storyline is clearly backgrounded on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the text could theoretically be continued infinitely and interrupted at any point, precisely because digressions follow each other in a serial fashion. A much stricter composition can be observed in Pushkin's work: although *Onegin* also contains several digressions that are not necessarily related to the story, whimsicality is only apparent. Behind that, there is a carefully worked-out structure, and as digressions are part of this, they do not endanger it (Dávidházi 1974: 499). Gyulai's solution is even more rigid, since his digressions are strictly related to the story. As also pointed out by Ferenc Papp, the romantic thought of sacrificing the point for subsidiary material was alien to Gyulai (Papp 1941: 164–166).

As a third point, Dávidházi (1974: 499–501) stresses the importance of metrics, critically remarking that *Romhányi* contains several metrical mistakes; that is, deviances that have no poetic function or additional meaning. As he observes, verse novels specifically require a high command of language and versification, authors generally tend to create the illusion of improvisation. Their aim is to show that although the poet writes rather whimsically and carelessly, he is still able to produce a good text (Dávidházi 1974: 500). Apart from the requirement of an advanced technical knowledge, it is also important to stress that verse novels not only obey the rules of rhyming but frequently also mock the pressure for rhymes: this, however, can only be successful if the text does not contain unintentionally bad rhymes.

Although the analysis provided by Dávidházi (1974) primarily aims at evaluating the text of *Romhányi* (in a generic context), it contains several observations that can be of importance for a better understanding of the genre of the verse novel. Nevertheless, various questions, of course, remain unanswered: for instance, while the alienating modality exemplified by verse novels, the structure based on digressions and the visibility of questions related to metrics can all be considered generic properties, it is not quite clear to what extent they are causes or consequences of the narrative structure typically observed in verse novels. Consequently, it is not clear either how the properties mentioned above are related to one another. In other words, the question remains whether they can be derived from each other to some degree, or whether there are other, even more fundamental properties from which all the three follow.

Giving answers to these questions would be crucial because that would allow for capturing the properties distinguishing the verse novel from other genres based on the narrative structure of the relevant texts. In addition, since Dávidházi (1974) analyses a text that deviates from certain established generic properties, it has to be investigated which features cannot be absent without making the given text marginal in generic terms, and which features are optional in the sense that their absence does not make a verse novel less typical.

2.1.2 Subjectivity and literariness – Imre (1990)

Regarding Hungarian verse novels, the most comprehensive account of the genre to date is undoubtedly the monograph of Imre (1990). In approaching the issue from several perspectives, various characteristics that are more or less generally present in Hungarian verse novels are identified. In what follows, I will naturally restrict myself to the discussion of the observations that are related to narratology (in a broader sense).

I will start with the question how the delimitation of the genre can be carried out, as Imre (1990) indeed aims at providing a general picture by examining a very large pool of texts instead of analysing particular examples. There seems to be considerable consensus in treating the verse novel as a genre of 19th-century epic poetry, which is exemplified by Byron's *Don Juan* and Pushkin's *Onegin* internationally (Imre 1990: 5). Verse novels are generally centred on some contemporary topic; they aim at a novel-like depiction of events, and they can be characterised by an empirical worldview. At the same time, the personal reflections and lyrical digressions of the narrator make the presentational mood subjective and the composition loose (Imre 1990: 5). In addition, the verse novel has its typical verse forms, the primary form being the (Byronic) stanza in Hungarian verse novels, yet strophes consisting of 12 or 14 lines are also attested, as an influence of Pushkin (Imre 1990: 5). Finally, Imre (1990: 5) claims that verse novels are characterised by a frivolous, colloquial style and the foregrounding of irony, which he considers as the reflex of a social, ideological and ethical crisis. In his interpretation, the genre rejecting the traditional literary methods and norms constitutes the artistic parallel of the crisis in 19th-century liberalism.

As can be seen, the perspectives taken up by Imre (1990) show a considerable overlap with the ones discussed by Dávidházi (1974), while there are naturally several differences; for instance, in the more decided inclusion of questions concerning intellectual history. Imre (1990: 5) observes that the term "verse novel" (Hungarian: "verses regény") is sometimes applied to texts that clearly do not meet the criteria mentioned above. Consequently, as far as generic history is concerned, it is imperative to state that a text qualifies as a verse novel if it conforms to the decisive criteria, which does not exclude the possibility of other texts being at the periphery of the genre, and in this sense transitional (Imre 1990: 5).

In line with this, Imre (1990) distinguishes between essentially three categories of texts. The first category consist of texts that are central from a generic point of view: these belong to the genre in the Byronic-Pushkinian sense in terms of their international inspiration, their verse form, composition, topic, worldview etc. (Imre 1990: 5). Examples include János Arany's *Bolond Istók* [Stephen the Fool], Pál Gyulai's *Romhányi* [Romhányi], László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages], János Vajda's *Találkozások* [Encounters], and József Kiss's *Legendák a nagyapámról* [About my Grandfather],[4] see Imre (1990: 5).

The second category contains texts that can conditionally be considered as verse novels: these belong to the genre in terms of most criteria (Imre 1990: 6). Examples include Endre Ady's *Margita élni akar* [Margita Wants to Live], János Vajda's *Alfréd regénye* [Alfréd's Romance], Gyula Reviczky's *Zdenko gróf* [Count Zdenko], Zoltán

4 The translation of the title follows Anthony Edkins's translation of an excerpt of József Kiss's verse novel, as it appears in Adam Makkai's anthology. The Hungarian title literally means 'Legends about my Grandfather'.

Somlyó's *A titkos írás* [The Secret Writing], and József Kiss's *Mese a varrógépről* [A Tale about the Sewing Machine], see Imre (1990: 6).

Finally, the third category refers to texts connected to the genre of the verse novel in some way. These can be important partly because they may illustrate the deviating variants as they were written precisely in the period when the verse novel was in vogue, and partly because they are related to the genre, even if this relation is distant (Imre 1990: 6). Such examples include Lőrinc Szabó's *Tücsökzene* [Cricket Music], Árpád Zempléni's *Didó* [Dido], Fruzina Szalay's *Madama Reále* [Madama Reále], Géza Gárdonyi's *Ygazság a földön* [Justice on Earth], and Pál Koroda's *Az igazak jutalma* [The Reward of the Righteous].

Regarding the more detailed analysis of the generic properties of the Hungarian verse novel, Imre (1990: 81–100) stresses the importance of disillusion, and, in connection with it, that of pessimism and melancholy. Regarding the Hungarian context, Imre (1990: 81) claims that this is primarily connected to the disillusionment following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867: hence, the genre reflects a state of hopelessness precisely by deforming traditional forms of epic poetry. According to Imre (1990: 82), these properties are primarily manifest in whimsical composition, mixed vocabulary, and an intent of parody that incessantly questions literary conventions. Disillusionment and resignation can commonly be observed in the narrator reflecting on the past or some vision of the future that seemed to be possible in the past. This is frequently intermingled with personal concerns, which is, according to Imre (1990: 82–85), closely related to the personal manifestations of the authors of the verse novels. In addition, the hero is often "superfluous" (Imre 1990: 86–95), meaning both that he feels to be so, and that his environment considers him so. It should be stressed that the appearance of "superfluous" heroes is not restricted to verse novels, but it can well be observed in prose novels: an example from Hungarian literature is István Toldy's *Anatole* [Anatole], see Imre (1990: 86, 88).

The appearance of disillusionment in verse novels affects narrative structure, chiefly because the heroes of disillusionment renounce various ideas before arriving on the level of reality, and these ideas are partly literary in nature (Imre 1990: 99–100). In this way, verse novels often pose "literariness" as a problem, which is thus merely a playful interaction between utterance and unveiling the utterance; that is, between artistic illusion and its deconstruction (Imre 1990: 100). This pervades almost all components of the text and is on a par with the main topic, as verse novels typically focus on the dichotomy of illusion and reality, as well as of literary fiction and objective worldview (Imre 1990: 100).

The problem of disillusionment is closely related to what Imre (1990: 101–115) terms the symptoms of the crisis of liberal ideas. This can be observed in the relativisation of certain values that had previously been considered fundamental, as can

be detected in *Bolond Istók*. According to Imre (1990: 101), this also infiltrates the entire structure of the verse novel, expressing general doubts concerning symmetry, regular arrangement, predictability and reliability by virtue of its loose and improvised nature. In this sense, the questions primarily related to intellectual history and world view have a direct structural impact. At the same time, verse novels exhibiting a clear orientation towards certain values are generally conceptually far-fetched (Imre 1990: 101–102). On the other hand, the heterogeneity of the genre allows for several texts showing a value-relativising attitude only in the forms of rather didactic truisms as well as for those maintaining a certainty in values (Imre 1990: 102–107). The uncertainty concerning values can, of course, affect diverse ideas, and potentially all major concepts of the 19th century (e.g. Darwinism) may be relativised. The phenomenon is not restricted to verse novels but can also be observed in a subtype of prose novels referred to as delusional novels; what seems to be special is the literary aspect, that is, the relativisation of romanticism (Imre 1990: 107–115). The last point is of crucial importance because it indicates an aspect where the intertextual connections of the verse novel can be observed particularly well.

Regarding the concepts primarily related to society, Imre (1990: 116–136) gives priority to the question how verse novels thematise the appearance of the changes affecting nationalism, national identity, and the transience of national identity. Verse novels are typically characterised by a (self)critical, refined national attitude; as observed by Imre (1990: 116), this is so partly due to the intellectual nature and ironic mood of the genre, and partly because Canto II of *Bolond Istók* established the practice by constantly mixing "serious" and "degrading" elements. In addition to general questions, there are some particular issues that several verse novels address; the most important one concerns the attitude towards the war of independence of 1848–1849, which is typically ambivalent and, contrary to most literary adaptations of the period, critical and sceptical (Imre 1990: 119–127). Another major recurring historic event is the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, which is also ambivalent, primarily associated with a sense of failure (Imre 1990: 131–136).

Turning back to literary aspects, Imre (1990: 137–153) considers the verse novel to be a deformation of the social novel. The close connection with the prose novel in this respect follows from a more general observation; namely is that Hungarian epic poetry in the 19th century (especially in the second half) took over the function of prose novels (Imre 1990: 137). In addition, the international antecedents of the Hungarian verse novel (*Don Juan*, *Onegin*) were also largely novel-like, but, according to Imre (1990: 137), Hungarian literature was a special context in that realism was unable to prevail in prose novels. As determining factors, he quotes the prolonged existence of romanticism and the impact of Mór Jókai, which both contributed to an increased interest in depicting reality and the everyday world in verse novels.

It is worth examining what Imre (1990) considers as "deformation": his argumentation suggests that the verse novel was supposed to substitute a lacking realist prose, but it was unable to fulfil this task properly (Imre 1990: 138). This apparent inadequacy is predominantly attributed to certain narrative properties, such as verse form, the storyline being choppy and constantly interrupted by digressions, and subjective mood. In this way, the formal properties of the genre (including loose composition and linguistic humour, among others) deform the novel-like shape, and reality can therefore be reflected only in a modified way (Imre 1990: 138). Regarding *Bolond Istók* in particular, Imre (1990: 139) claims that depicting reality is subordinate to the major concept, and thus the novel-like output is deformed: for instance, the realistic depiction of life at boarding school serves the purpose of explaining the later life of the protagonist. Imre (1990: 141) is also critical of *Romhányi*, which presents a realistic picture of the nobility, yet this is communicated via casual, almost whimsical remarks, which contributes to the deformation of a truly novel-like representation.

The closest approximate to the depiction of society as seen in realist novels is achieved by *A délibábok hőse* (Imre 1990: 141–145), which provides an analytical, panoramic view of society. While Imre (1990: 143) considers this a true merit of the text, he also adds that this aspect is embedded in a complex system of literary references, thereby deforming the social novel. Moreover, the typical forms of the 19th-century (prose) novel also seem to be subject to criticism, since properties that are characteristic of the novel are constantly intertwined with those that work against a novel-like composition, resulting in a decided lack of proper composition and questioning the methods of the contemporary high-ranked prose novel (Imre 1990: 143–144). In other words, *A délibábok hőse* evokes certain literary texts, which are contrasted with each other (Imre 1990: 144).

This is also reflected in the various roles and behaviour patterns taken up by the hero, Balázs Hűbele:[5] these essentially all conform to the schemas of a literary trend or genre, in accordance with the roles Balázs identifies with based on his ideals and readings (Imre 1990: 145). While Imre (1990: 145) does not see the system of literary references as a hindrance to the description of society being effective, he considers it as a differentiation from a truly novel-like fashion, as a "semantic surplus". At any rate, Imre (1990: 147) claims that society must be reflected on in verse novels – otherwise, a given text cannot or can only marginally be considered as a verse novel.

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5 The hero's name in Hungarian is "Hűbele Balázs" (note that the family name precedes the given name in Hungarian), which is a character-revealing name; it was translated by J. G. Nichols as "Harry Harum-Scarum". As Nichols describes in an explanatory footnote, the term "Hűbele Balázs" is a common idiom in Hungarian, "designating someone acting rashly, without forethought", and "is thought of having been an exhortation like 'hurry up!'". The name was thus transparent for the contemporary reader. As with other character names, the original name of the character will be used in this dissertation (mostly only the given name, as this is also the form primarily used in László Arany's verse novel).

Apart from the social novel, verse novels also deform the psychological novel (Imre 1990: 154–167). On the one hand, many verse novels are characterised by a complex, sophisticated approach to the human psyche, for instance, in János Arany's *Bolond Istók*, Pál Gyulai's *Romhányi*, and László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* (Imre 1990: 154–160). On the other hand, the strong presence of literariness often makes character description in verse novels elevated and stylised (Imre 1990: 162). Depending on its extent, this may lead to the complete deformation of the psychological novel and the disappearance of a realistic approach to the psyche: this can be observed in János Vajda's *Találkozások*, and especially in Endre Ady's *Margita élni akar* (Imre 1990: 166–167).

What has been said so far mostly pertains to the intertextual properties of verse novels. In addition, Imre (1990) discusses some further generic properties that are relevant from a narratological viewpoint. Asymmetrical composition is one such example: following Lotman (1975: 45), Imre (1990: 168) claims that a Byronic-Pushkinian verse novel is an artistic text pretending to be inartistic and has a structure pretending to be the absence of structure.

This double nature goes back to Byron: various, apparently irreconcilably different parts of the text seem to follow each other in an improvised way, without any conscious underlying design, while, in fact, they reinterpret each other on a more abstract level, thereby assigning new meanings to the individual parts (Imre 1990: 169). The personal foregrounding of the narrator is also typical: this may be connected to the story, but it often rather manifests in aphorisms and interruptions, while it may also be a subjective digression on the narrator's part (Imre 1990: 169–174). Subjective manifestations are frequently placed at the beginning of individual cantos (Imre 1990: 171–173).

Taking one example, Imre (1990: 175) claims that *Bolond Istók* is homogeneous in the sense that humour acts as a major worldview uniting the otherwise heterogeneous interplay of a storyline and the narrator's personal confessions, which not only alternate with but also copy and complement each other. In this way, *Bolond Istók* represents a text where the chief dimension is a quest for narrative perspectives, its attitude is the alternation of attitudes, and its worldview is the constant changing of various possible worldviews. The reason why all this does not result in chaos is that everything is subsidiary to the sole artistic purpose of unveiling literariness (Imre 1990: 175). Displaying literariness is often carried out by (genre) parody, which, in terms of composition, can primarily be observed in the narrator's evoking certain genres and contrasting them with their offsets (cf. Imre 1990: 179–184).

The lack of structure is thus merely apparent and can be considered as a direct reflection of literariness: as such, it results in a complex text (cf. Imre 1990: 175). It is a crucial observation of Imre (1990: 176) that verse novels have two major levels, an epical level (the story of the hero) and a lyrical level (the subjective manifestations of

the narrator). While their characteristics and proportion may show considerable variation among individual verse novels, Hungarian verse novels typically show a balance of the two.

Regarding asymmetric composition, unfinishedness is also a typical feature: this may refer either to a fragmented work (e.g. *Romhányi*) or to an uncompleted storyline (e.g. *A délibábok hőse*), see Imre (1990: 177). While this is indeed a deviation from certain literary traditions, fragments are not restricted to verse novels (cf. Imre 1990: 178–180) even though fragmentariness is a more or less explicit convention of the verse novel (Imre 1990: 177, 181). Apart from the ending, the abandonment of the storyline can also be observed at various points of the text in the form of digressions: the narrator seems to dishevel the plot and to quit not only the story but also the literary text (Imre 1990: 184–185).

Such narrative gestures and the constant foregrounding of the narrator make the text subjective, dominated by his personal remarks, which may refer to the biographical author in some way (cf. Imre 1990: 187–197). Subjectivity can also be observed in a shift from epic poetry towards lyric poetry (Imre 1990: 190–192, 195). In addition, the narrator's mood, just like the story and its various parts, is characterised by humour, irony and self-irony, all of which contribute to an increasingly subjective way of narration (Imre 1990: 197–212).

As was discussed earlier, literariness is an important property of verse novels: it refers to the highlighting of the literary, artificial, sometimes even pretentious quality of the text by means of its linguistic form (Imre 1990: 213). Consequently, literature very often becomes a topic in verse novels: this, of course, has several precedents, and German romantic authors can be regarded as immediate precedents, primarily the works of Heine, Lenau and Tieck (Imre 1990: 213–214; regarding German influence, see also Németh 1978: 53–54). As a further consequence, verse novels are generally characterised by intertextuality, and there are several texts referred to this way (Imre 1990: 217–227).

Another important aspect of literariness is the confrontation with the reader's expectations, especially the reader's (supposed) expectation that the text can be read without any hindrances to identification, whilst the narrator makes this impossible by constantly calling attention to its literary nature (Imre 1990: 227). This is often done by highlighting certain elements of versification, word games, or using expressions that are alien in the given context with respect to their style (Imre 1990: 227–235). In addition, the narrator may communicate with the readers by directly addressing them (Imre 1990: 238–241).

The analysis provided by Imre (1990) has several important findings concerning the narrative structure of the verse novel. However, since the basis of his approach is not narratological, the findings presented above do not provide a system that

would enable unfolding which characteristics exactly make the verse novel an independent genre. Theferore, it remains unclear how the relation between central and peripheral texts can be described ("central" and "peripheral" taken from a generic and not from an aesthetic point of view).

On the other hand, while the criteria proposed by Imre (1990) are all relevant in terms of the verse novel, not all of them are as fundamental from a generic perspective as to isolate the verse novel from other genres and as to be an inherent property of the verse novel rather than an optional one appearing in certain individual texts. For instance, topical elements such as the revolution of 1848 or the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 do not necessarily contribute to a better understanding of the verse novel, since the same or similar topics are addressed in other genres as well. At the same time, the fact that verse novels relate to and adopt these topics slightly differently, thereby also opposing the trend established by other literary works or genres, may signify a property that follows from the formal characteristics of the verse novel.

In this respect, Imre (1990) offers two fundamental criteria that I would like to incorporate into my analysis, namely subjectivity and literariness. These are partly independent criteria for Imre (1990), but they also interact and interfere with others. For example, Imre (1990) addresses questions of intertextuality and literariness when discussing the deformation of the social and the psychological novel, even though he interprets literariness as a hindrance working against the full realisation of the aforementioned genres.

Such a stance is, however, quite problematic, especially as far as its methodological implications are concerned: the verse novel as a genre is distinct from any genre of the supercategory "prose novel", and it is not quite appropriate to expect a certain genre to conform to the criteria of others. In this way, literariness is partly regarded as a deficit by Imre (1990), even though his analysis otherwise shows that literariness, the reinterpretation of literary conventions, and the reflection upon these are in fact all fundamental characteristics of the text. Consequently, an optimal analysis should rather treat literariness as a fundamental feature and the relation to other genres not as a deformation but rather as examples of thematising literature. On the other hand, as Imre (1990) points out, the construction and versification of the text are also thematised elements; hence, literariness is directly related to matters of composition. In this sense, the subordination of other genres is not a by-product but follows from the narrative characteristics of the verse novel.

For Imre (1990), subjectivity is a property undermining the conventions of other genres, apart from being a distinctive feature of the verse novel in some way. Just as in the case of literariness, it should be obvious that subjectivity is to be regarded as a fundamental feature, since, as Imre (1990) emphasises, the narrator's reflections

affect several layers of the text, as well as the dialogues with the reader. Furthermore, asymmetric composition is essentially a result of arbitrariness from the narrator's part; hence, subjectivity is not merely a surface phenomenon but rather a fundamental structural feature.

Finally, it is not clear from the analysis given by Imre (1990) whether the visibility of narrative structure (that is, the narrator's reflections on the text) is completely arbitrary with respect to its distribution within a text, or whether it can be tied to certain special points. Imre (1990) does in fact mention that reflections often take place at the beginning of the individual cantos; in addition, he discusses the ending of verse novels in detail. As he points out, the storyline generally ends in such a way as to create the impression of fragmentariness, even if the piece is not a de facto fragment. The most important question in this respect is whether unfinishedness is reflected on in the text, and whether it is related to some previous points. In other words, the question should be addressed whether the text simply ends at an arbitrary point, or whether this gesture is thematised as well; furthermore, especially in the latter case, whether it can be related to similar gestures attested earlier in the text, and whether it follows from the previous parts of the text.

In sum, Imre (1990) presents crucially important findings with respect to the narrative structure of verse novels; the latter, however, need to be discussed further and accommodated in a systematic framework.

2.1.3 Double-layer structure – Szajbély (2002)

In this section, I will review the analysis by Szajbély (2002). This analysis explicitly adopts a system-based approach to the relationship between a specific text, here László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages], and the complexity of its own system (literature) on the one hand and the broader system (society) on the other hand. Szajbély (2002: 146) primarily adopts an evolutional viewpoint, concentrating on what kinds of reductions had to be applies to the complexity of various media at hand for the specific text to emerge.

He distinguishes between two layers in *A délibábok hőse*: an epical layer and a lyrical layer (Szajbély 2002: 146). For instance, there are two heroes in the text: Balázs Hűbele and the narrator, the latter not only telling the story of Balázs but also commenting it, ultimately pushing the text in a lyrical direction (Szajbély 2002: 146). In addition, as Szajbély (2002: 146) observes, the double-layer structure is not an idiosyncratic property of *A délibábok hőse* but a general characteristic of the verse novel: the narrator steps forward directly and comments on the story, while his remarks

do not necessarily constitute a lyrical self-confession. On the other hand, it is possible that the personal confessions of the narrator become so emphatic that the usual pattern observed in verse novels is turned upside down: instead of the narrator commenting on the story of the hero, the hero serves to comment and to illustrate the self-confession of the narrator (Szajbély 2002: 146).

This is to a large extent reflected on as well: the narrator presents his hero right at the beginning of the text as someone whose story can illustrate the national characteristics of Hungarians. Before he spells out these national characteristics, he provides a lyrical self-confession, which relates his own person to the national characteristics in question (Szajbély 2002: 146–147). However, neither the narrator's story nor that of Balázs seem to illustrate these national characteristics, as the text later confirms. Hence, there is a clear difference between what the actual stories do (not) illustrate and what the narrator's comments try to establish by suggesting that Balázs's story should be interpreted as a parable (Szajbély 2002: 147–150). Regarding the narrator's comments, it is also important to stress that the narrator's attitude towards his hero is not constant: it is very often ironic and distanced. However, a sympathetic attitude can frequently be observed as well, and occasionally the narrator pronouncedly identifies with the hero (Szajbély 2002: 149–150).

Szajbély (2002) interprets all these patterns as the reduction of contemporary society in the specific text; in addition, he identifies another reduction, namely that of contemporary and earlier literary texts, which roughly complies with the problem of intertextuality (see Szajbély 2002: 152). As Szajbély (2002: 152) points out, *A délibábok hőse* is rich in allusions and quotations: this is related to the figure of the distanced narrator who regards his old-time predecessors' texts (and the old-time illusions) with the same forgiving and humorous attitude as he does the youth of himself and his hero (and the respective illusions). In this way, literature is thematised, too; moreover, it is closely connected to the topics of the epical and the lyrical layers of the text.

I consider the analysis provided by Szajbély (2002) important for two reasons. First, by introducing the notion of the double-layered structure, he approaches the narrative characteristics of the verse novel in a systematic way and provides a framework based on the structure of the text that may explain the hybrid nature of the verse novel; that is, the mixture of epical and lyrical traits. Second, he also shows that the system of literary allusions – using the terminology of Imre (1990), the literariness of the verse novel – is closely related to both layers.

At the same time, since Szajbély (2002) presents only a concise analysis of *A délibábok hőse*, many of the questions he raises remain open, especially with respect to the verse novel as a genre. For instance, it seems to be important that the narrator provides some description as to his intentions with his opus, and the subsequent parts of the text are related to this fundamental description in various ways: it may

not satisfy the description, and it is possible for the narrator to keep referring back to the starting point. This also suggests that, from a generic point of view, it would be important to investigate how typical such descriptions are from the narrator's part, and how these are related to the rest of the text and the narrative structure.

Finally, while the double-layer structure is undoubtedly adequate for modelling the narrative structure of verse novels, it should be kept in mind that the picture is far more complex; thefeore, additional factors should be considered. Szajbély (2002) essentially claims that the lyrical layer reflects on the epical layer, possibly also interrupting it from time to time. However, verse novels also show examples where reflections concern the way of narrating the story, hence the lyrical layer, as is also the case in the narrator's descriptions at the beginning of *A délibábok hőse*. This bears crucial relevance to the question of literariness, since verse novels in this way reflect on their own textual status, which is related to the system of intertextual references.

2.1.4 Humorous ethics– Z. Kovács (2008)

Although the analysis by Z. Kovács (2008) is primarily devoted to the ethical aspects of *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages], several of his findings are also relevant from a narratological viewpoint. An interpretation based on the relationship between humour and ethics is a fundamental aspect in the analysis of Németh (1960, 1971) concentrating on intellectual history, and in the analysis of Imre (1990) concentrating on genre history, since these analyses are also centred on the question of the relationship between the protagonist and the narrator (Z. Kovács 2008: 52).

Following primarily Newton (1995), Z. Kovács (2008: 53–54) distinguishes three ethic layers: narrational ethics, representational ethics, and hermeneutic ethics. The first concerns the relationship between the various elements of the narrative situation (that is, the narrator and the recipient, as well as the intended reader and the various forms of the author); the ethical aspect concerns certain identificational moves that are errors from a narratological viewpoint but are immanent consequences of the narrative logic (Z. Kovács 2008: 53–54). For example, if the narrator's viewpoint is identified with that of a character during the reading process, this is done by relying on some authority, creating a value hierarchy among the elements of the narrative structure (Z. Kovács 2008: 53–54). Representational ethics examines the consequences of persons becoming characters; this also includes the phenomenon of reading narratives as the life narratives of historical figures (Z. Kovács 2008: 54). Finally, hermeneutic ethics is concerned with the ethical aspect of the answers given to the reading of the texts (Z. Kovács 2008: 54).

As Z. Kovács (2008: 54) points out, the relation between hero and narrator (and author) in the case of *A délibábok hőse* is not merely a representational problem: it has a much broader perspective since it is fundamentally tied to the literary discourse of the second half of the 19th century. Here, Z. Kovács (2008: 55) notes that the analysis by Imre (1990), concentrating on genre history, end in a paradox (cf. a similar concern raised at the end of section 2.1.3 of the present dissertation). The problem is that Imre (1990) interprets the verse novel both as destroyer and as continuation of regular composition and the novel's conventions, which seriously questions the possibility of writing genre history using clear-cut features (Z. Kovács 2008: 55).

Indeed, it should not be overlooked that the verse novel is a genre that builds upon reflections; one component is humour, which appears as a national trait in 19th-century literature (Z. Kovács 2008: 55–57). However, humour as a means of self-knowledge can only be applied in the interpretation of the literary work if this can be justified by the author being identificational and critical at the same time: this dual nature is fundamentally true of verse novels (Z. Kovács 2008: 57).

Comparing *A délibábok hőse* and *A hunok harca* [The Battle of the Huns], Z. Kovács (2008: 60–61) shows that the latter addresses national and/or political questions in a direct, immediate way, whereby the narrator proclaims his viewpoints; this is a property that László Arany associated with lyric poetry rather than with epic poetry. By contrast, *A délibábok hőse* is characterised by the occurrence of some sort of mediation and by the lack of a thesis: this also includes that the narrator can have an impact on his reader via his relationship with his hero. Regarding narrative structure, this means that the relationship between interpreter and text mirrors the dual nature of the relationship between the narrator and Balázs (the hero); that is, the dichotomy of distance (resulting from a need for criticism) and limitations (resulting from common conventions), see Z. Kovács (2008: 62).

The most conspicuous manifestation of this relationship can primarily be observed at the end of the text: the motive of self-deception connects the story of the hero and the act of storytelling and makes the two reflect on each other (Z. Kovács 2008: 63). Focalisation is also shown by the fact that the narrator sometimes takes up the hero's viewpoint (hence, partly identifying with him), while at other times he clearly speaks from the position of an external observer (Z. Kovács 2008: 64–65).

Another structural dichotomy concerns reflections: reflections that support a parabolic reading are complemented with their ironic mirror images, which makes re-contextualisation a basic mechanism of the text (Z. Kovács 2008: 70). Given this structure, it is not surprising that the result is not a Bildungsroman dissolving dichotomies but a humorous narrative that does not provide a solution yet claims the necessity of dissolution (Z. Kovács 2008: 70).

A key insight provided by Z. Kovács (2008) is that the narrative structure of *A délibábok hőse* is closely connected to the story, and narrative structure is thematised, which is relevant in terms of reading. While it is implied that this system involves reflections on other literary works, it is not quite clear how it is done, since it seems to be the case that the text not only reflects upon itself, but it also establishes connections to other texts.

More importantly, it needs to be checked whether the findings concerning *A délibábok hőse* are likewise valid in the case of other verse novels, as it remains unclear which features are inherent generic properties, and which features are idiosyncratic properties of the given text. For instance, the mutual reflection between narrator and hero regarding the motive of self-deception is not necessarily present in other texts, while it is perfectly possible that the gesture of mutual reflection can be detected in some other forms. Since this kind of mutual reflection is clearly related to the general questions of narrative structure, clarifying the status of these properties between a specific text and the genre as such may again result in a more accurate understanding of the verse novel as a genre.

2.2 Structure and reflexivity

In line with what was said above, I will attempt to provide a model for the narrative structure of the verse novel which does not treat reflexivity as a by-product (or as a narrative error) but as a fundamental feature defining the whole of the narrative structure, thereby separating the particular genre from others.

A wide variety of reflections is attested in verse novels; this is so because, on the one hand, a given reflection may affect various layers of the text, and, on the other hand, the narrator can deviate from the subject of reflection to varying degrees. Regarding the textual layers, it has to be distinguished between the diegetic and the extradiegetic layers; regarding the deviation from the subject of reflection, there are reflections that remain close to the subject and others where the narrator uses the given subject as an excuse to start talking about something else. All this leads to four logical combinations; however, it must be stressed that the individual types are not distinct from one another in the sense that a given reflection may show the features of more than one basic type at the same time, thus constituting a transition between theoretically distinct categories. Bearing this in mind, separating the categories still provides a working hypothesis that may identify the pivots of the narrative structure of the genre and thus may be suitable for defining the genre on formal theoretical grounds.

Since verse novels are narrative texts, two layers can be identified: the diegetic level, which refers to the story that is narrated, and the extradiegetic level, which refers to the way the story is narrated (cf. Genette 1972, 1983; Rimmon-Kenan 1997). The narrator may refer to either of these layers.

2.2.1 Reflections on the diegetic level

The first type constitutes reflections on the diegetic level that remain close to the narrated story: these are examples where the narrator comments on the events (or a particular event) of the story and makes personal remarks on them. These can be well observed in János Vajda's *Találkozások* [Encounters] when the narrator remarks on his hero's attempts to seduce a girl (cf. Bacskai-Atkari 2009):

> Denique Ernő egyre „golyhóbb";
> De hát ily állapot s eset,
> Én istenem, hát ennyi s ily csók
> Vajh kit nem részegitne meg?
> Egyébiránt biz ő nem is szent;
> S hiába, a mit ezután tett –
> Hja, már ha erre gondolok,
> Én magam is dühös vagyok.
>
> *Thenceforward Ernő is increasingly "silly":*
> *But such a state and event,*
> *Oh my God, so many and such kisses,*
> *Well, who would not be befuddled by them?*
> *Moreover, he is not a saint indeed either;*
> *And, no wonder, what he next did –*
> *Well, if I consider that,*
> *I am angry myself.*
>
> (János Vajda, *Találkozások*, A nyaralóban [In the summer house], stanza 59)

At this point, the narrator at this point seems to be defending his hero, who is claimed to be a quasi-victim of the circumstances, and his deeds are hence morally acceptable: at least, this is what the narrator tries to convince the reader of. However, he also acknowledges that Ernő's deed (which is not made very explicit) is morally outrageous, and the narrator therefore pretends to be enraged. Naturally, the

tone he takes up cannot completely cover his real tone (and opinion), and the gesture of being enraged becomes ironic.

The narrator's comments can also be personal in the sense that they (partly) concern his personal life. This can be observed in the following stanza of the first part of József Kiss's *Legendák a nagyapámról* [About my Grandfather]:

> 1843. nov. 30.-án hétfőről keddre virradóra jött a világra elsőszülött fiam, a Józsi. (Az én volnék.) Az isten tartsa meg. A keresztelőjén pompás hevesi görögdinnyét ettünk. (Tessék, a görögdinnyémet is más ette meg!)[6]
>
> *On 30th November 1943, in the night from Monday to Tuesday, my first son, Józsi, was born. (That would be me.) May God preserve him. We ate a splendid watermelon from Heves on his christening day. (There you go, even my watermelon was eaten by someone else!)*
>
> (József Kiss, *Legendák a nagyapámról*, Édesanyám imádságoskönyvéből [From my mother's prayer book])

Given that the text assumes its author to be the narrator's mother, the narrator himself is of course personally involved. This personal involvement is reinforced by his first bracketed comment, and the second one is a straightforwardly ironic remark, which in part serves to comment on the narrated event, and in part refers to some further similar problems not explicated at this point.

The second type of reflections concerns digressions: these are reflections on the diegetic level showing more deviation from the story. That is, the narrator's speech shows increased independency of the story, and it gives the impression that its actual subject has been lost and narration has transformed into mere prattle, the subject of which is fully dependent on the arbitrary decisions of the narrator. For instance, when presenting his hero, the narrator of *Bolond Istók* [Stephen the Fool] mentions that Istók was not intelligent and that this was obvious when looking at his forehead. Having thus raised a possible phrenological connection, he utters the following:

6 The quoted text (as well as the entire part entitled *Édesanyám imádságoskönyvéből*) does not appear in the 1911 edition of the text; it is from the first complete edition of 1928.

Nincs ostobább, mint a külső idombul
Belbecsre vonni következtetést;
Megengedjen dr. Gall, de bolondul
Keresi hajszálak között az észt,
(A dinnye az csak, mely úgy jó, ha kondul,)
S nem mindig hősi termet ad vitézt:
Például, ott van a *kis törpe lengyel*,
Szegény! ő meglehetős majom-ember.

There is nothing more stupid than to draw conclusions
Regarding internal attributes based on external appearance;
Pardon me, Dr Gall, but you are quite foolishly
Looking for the intellect among hairs,
(It is only true for melons that they are good if they toll)
And it is not always a heroic constitution that gives a hero:
For example, there is the small dwarfish Pole,
Poor fellow! He is quite like an ape.

(János Arany, *Bolond Istók*, Canto I, stanza 14)

The narrator seems to have brought in the phrenological analysis into the preceding stanza by accident, and now he condemns it as false; moreover, all this is done when the introduction of Istók has just begun before actually starting the narration of the story. In addition, digression is multiple: there is a generally applicable statement (namely, that there is no connection between external and internal features) from which the narrator digresses to Gall's theory and to Józef Bem. The tone is obviously ironic, especially regarding the treatment of Bem, an iconic figure of the Hungarian war of independence 1848–1849; the same irony was already present in the treatment of Istók (as is obvious from his name that identifies him as a fool).

It is worth mentioning that the narrator's digressions are not always merely deviations from the storyline but they may constitute the very points of the text where connections to certain (literary) discussions are established. Regarding the quotation above, it is interesting to compare Arany's designation *kis törpe lengyel* 'small dwarfish Pole' with the *Óda* 'Ode' written by Károly Szász: the latter appeared in a special issue (17th October 1880) of *Vasárnapi Újság* [Sunday News], which was mostly devoted to Bem on the occasion of the unveiling of his statue on the same day. The very designation used by Arany appears in Szász's poem as one used in a pejorative way by Bem's enemies, not by Bem's Hungarian fellows. The narrator of

Bolond Istók makes it clear in the next stanza that he has high regard of Bem. Nevertheless, his designation goes against an established linguistic and cultural code (and is therefore offensive towards the subject) which does not allow any such criticism, precisely because it is built upon the necessary union of physical and other (mental, military etc.) excellences.

The following locus of *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages] also shows an instance of opening discourse:

Kortársi közt, kik útat nem találva,
Az élet ösvenyén mentek vakon,
Be volt előttök minden pálya zárva,
S merő szokásból tengtek a jogon,
Hogy majdan, a tanéveket lejárva,
Honn, a hanyatló ősi birtokon
Vonuljanak meg, míg van, inni, enni,
Busulni a honért, és mit se tenni.

Nincs úgy-e, *most*, ki helyét jól betöltse
Nem leltek, úgy-e, férfit eleget,
S becsmérlitek, multnak sok régi bölcse,
A korcsosúló nemzedékeket?
Hát lessz-e a fának nemes gyümölcse,
Mely elvadulva fajzott, senyvedett,
– Kit köny ha öntözött, keserv ha érlelt:
Hogy lenne czélnál, kit czél nem vezérelt!

Among his contemporaries, who, not finding their way,
Walked on the path of life blindly,
All fields were closed before them,
And they loitered around in law school merely out of habit,
So that once, having finished the academic years,
They could withdraw at home, on the declining ancestral estate,
As long as it stands, to drink, to eat,
To bewail the motherland, and to do nothing.

There is not even one to fit his position well now, *is there,*
You cannot find enough men, can you,
Many sages of the past, and you disparage
The degenerate generations?

Well, can precious fruit be expected from a tree
That wildly deteriorated, suffered,
– Who was at most watered by tears, at most ripened by sorrow:
How could one be at his goal, one who was never driven by goals?

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto I, stanzas 20–21)

The narrator starts with describing the career patterns of his hero, Balázs Hűbele and those of his hero's contemporaries: this is a direct continuation of the preceding description of Balázs's youth. At this point, however, the general statement concerning Balázs and his friends is further generalised, now applying to an entire generation; and it is this phenomenon which prompts him to express his personal opinion, addressing the readers (or at least a subset of readers) and contesting their (possible) views. This is clearly an instance of digression, since, on the one hand, the narration of the story is interrupted, and, on the other hand, there is a shift of focus: the story serves merely as an illustration and becomes secondary to a generational problem. However, it is also a proper digression in the sense that the narrator does continue storytelling in the next stanza; hence, the shift of focus is only temporary.

2.2.2 Reflections on the extradiegetic level

The third type involves reflections on the extradiegetic level that remain close to the given text: the narrator refers to the way of narration, that is, the linguistic and poetic properties the text. This is illustrated by the first two stanzas of Pál Gyulai's *Romhányi* [Romhányi] below. The first line echoes Sándor Petőfi's 1849 poem *Európa csendes, újra csendes* [Europe is Silent, Silent Again],[7] which is dedicated to the putting down of the 1848 revolutions in Europe except for Hungary, where the war of independence (1848–1849) was still taking place; hence, Gyulai's text begins with an intertextual reference that helps the (contemporary) reader locate the time of the story. Consider:

És Magyarország újra csendes:
Nem kelti zaj, nem nyomja had,
A fecske újra bátran repdes
S megszáll a honnan elriadt;
A holtakat mind eltemették,
Az élő hallgat biztosan,
Kit elfogtak, börtönbe tették,

[7] I owe many thanks to István Kenesei for indirectly calling my attention to this poem.

Egy szóval: rend és béke van.
Csak a szív zajg és fel-feltámad
A le nem győzött bosszu s bánat,
De népek úgy mint egyesek
Megszoknak és felejtenek.

Igy gondolá Bécs bölcsesége,
És Európa hitt neki,
Reánk jött éhes vampyr-népe,
Hogy szívünk vérét szíjja ki…
De elég ebből immár ennyi,
Nem speech lesz e kis költemény,
S a lapokkal mért versenyezni
A honfi-phrasis mezején?
Im eldobom hát a sallangját,
Nem áhitom a karzat tapsát,
Sem honlyányok gyöngéd kegyét,
Nem majmolom Biharmegyét.

And Hungary is silent again:
It is not woken by clamour, it is not trod by troops,
The swallow flies about fearlessly again
And rests where it was deterred from;
The dead have all been buried,
The living are certain to remain silent,
Whoever was caught, has been imprisoned,
In other words: there is order and peace.
Only the heart jangles and undefeated
Revenge and sorrow rise again and again,
But nations, just like individuals,
Accommodate and forget.

So thought the wisdom of Vienna,
And Europe believed it,
They sent their hungry vampire-nation
To suck out the blood of our hearts…
But enough of this,
This little poem is not going to be a speech,
And why compete with the papers

On the field of national rhetoric?
So, I throw away its frippery,
I do not long for the applause from the balcony in parliament,
Nor for the gentle grace of the true countrywomen,
I do not imitate Bihar County.

(Pál Gyulai, *Romhányi*, Canto I, stanzas 1–2)

The narrator first provides a highly ironic description of the state of Hungary after the war of independence of 1848–1849 (in stanza 1). At the beginning of the second stanza (lines 1–2), he specifies who he attributes these thoughts to, followed by an alternative interpretation of the country's state (lines 3–4), which differs radically both from the preceding ironic description and from the alienating gestures that are to follow. He refers to these two lines in line 5 when he interrupts the hypothetical alternative narrative, and, instead of continuing it, he argues against doing so and establishes the status of his own version with respect to this rejected alternative. Given that the possible but rejected narrative is treated ironically, his own version is not only interpreted as different but also as superior. The same problem is addressed several times later on by the narrator of *Romhányi*; hence, the instance quoted above is not isolated and accidental but it is rather an important thematic element of the text (cf. Bacskai-Atkari 2008a: 47–58).

A similar gesture can be observed in Gyula Reviczky's *Szeptember* [September]:

De hagyjuk már az ifjuságot.
Nem líra ez, hanem regény.
Hősöm javára félreállok;
Eztán csupán a rím enyém.
Dicsérnek majd ifjú titánok
És megvesznek szegény diákok,
Vén lányok és szük sorsuak,
Kiket lenéznek az – urak.[8]

But let us leave youth.
This is not lyric poetry but a novel.
I step to the side for my hero;
From now on, I will only have the rhymes.
The young titans will praise me

8 The quoted text is taken from the 2007 critical edition of Reviczky's oeuvre; it corresponds to the version before 22 February 1885. The entire work is unfinished and available only in fragments.

And I will sell by poor students,
Spinsters and the ones with a moderate state,
Who are despised by the – gentlemen.

(Gyula Reviczky, *Szeptember*, fragment 1, stanza 11)

Just as in the case of *Romhányi*, the narrator reflects on a preceding part of the text which he rejects in the sense that he deems it as not strictly belonging to the topic of the text, thus as digression. What is more, he regards it as a kind of digression alien to the genre since, as he argues, it is a property of lyric poetry to enable one to talk about one's youth, which is not appropriate in a novel. Strictly speaking, the subject of a novel is supposed to be the hero, and the narrator's task is to present the hero's story in a suitable form. Paradoxically, however, the narrator mentions the hero here for the first time and makes him the centre of the text only in the following stanza: until this very point, the narrator's personal memories as well as the act of writing poetry and the quality of the resulting text have been more central.

Let us now turn to the fourth (and last) type of reflections. As can be seen from the discussion so far, reflections on the extradiegetic level typically involve some sort of alienating gesture: the narrator may distance himself from the readers' expectations or text types as well as from the possibility of foregrounding his personal recollection or opinion. This alienating gesture is intensified in the case of reflections on the extradiegetic level moving further away from the given text when the narrator defines his text with respect to other genres, partly entering into certain literary discussions, and partly mocking these genres.

A wide scale of genres can be parodied: the most important ones are the epic and the novel (regarding novels, romantic adventure novels must be highlighted). The epic is of course also an antecedent of the verse novel, the classical epic as well as the mock epic (cf. Imre 1990: 511–512); this question will be addressed in Chapter 4 in more detail. The parody of the epic in verse novels essentially means that the conventions of the epic, which are far stricter than those of the verse novel, are disarranged in the looser context of the verse novel, their meaning and forms are modified, and they are generally subject to an ironic treatment.

A typical manifestation of this phenomenon is the inclusion of an invocation: this often takes place with considerable delay, and its appropriateness becomes almost immediately questionable. For instance, the invocation of *A délibábok hőse* is placed at the beginning of Canto III; as far as its form and tone are concerned, it is essentially classical and reminiscent of Virgil's *Aeneid* and Miklós Zrínyi's *Szigeti veszedelem* [The Siege of Sziget][9]. However, such an invocation clearly does not match the rather unheroic

9 The translation of the title follows László Kőrössy's 2011 translation (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press).

army to be described somewhat later. Note that the allusion to the *Aeneid* is present only in the form of the "*Ille ego...*" beginning, the authorship of which is contested now; still, there is no doubt that even János Arany considered it as part of the *Aeneid*. Hence, as far as the second half of the 19th century is concerned, quoting these lines can be considered as allusions to Virgil in the period (see Dávidházi 2007: 13 for more details). The verse novel may imitate the epic by evoking specific, typical and representative texts, without the aim of parodying these specific texts. Rather, the aim is to mock the epic as a genre (at least to some extent) on the one hand and to achieve a highly ironic representation of the world described in the verse novel on the other hand, by contrasting this world with the unsuitable epic dimensions. At the locus in question, the narrator of *A délibábok hőse* turns from the invocation to another conventional part of the epic, the enumeration of the army: however, the Hungarian army is certainly not depicted as a glorious army but rather as a pathological collection.

It is common for the invocation to be carried out late in verse novels; a typical instance is shown by the second stanza of Canto II of *Bolond Istók*, occurring after an entire canto and from the narrator's point of view also after "a multitude of years" ("*tengersok év*"). The tone is highly ironic:

> Oh Múzsa! kit minden poéta *per te*
> Szólít, midőn szülési kínja nagy,
> Midőn a szeplő homlokát kiverte
> És új Minervától feszűl az agy –
> Méltóztassál hozzám leszállni, mert te
> A versek jóltevő bábája vagy:
> Törvényes a sarj, vagy törvénytelen,
> Az végre mindegy, csak te légy jelen.
>
> *Oh Muse! you, whom all poets address* per te,
> *When their childbirth pains are excessive,*
> *When their foreheads are covered by freckles,*
> *And the brain is strained by a new Minerva –*
> *Will you deign to descend to me, because*
> *You are the good midwife of poems:*
> *Whether the offspring be legitimate or illegitimate*
> *Is ultimately irrelevant, what matters is that you be present.*
>
> (János Arany, *Bolond Istók*, Canto II, stanza 2)

There is an allusion to the existing epic tradition, which is also explicitly reflected on; however, neither the way and tone of addressing the muse nor the depiction of poetic creation and the product thereof match the classical expectations of invocation, which would presuppose (a greater amount of) reverence in both respects.

Apart from the epic, another frequently parodied genre is the romantic adventure novel. This can be well observed in *A délibábok hőse*, when the narrator announces that his hero, Balázs Hűbele, has escaped from the army. The narrator continues as follows:

> Majd észrevették s a tenger fokáig
> Egész csapat zsandár üldözte őt;
> Itt viz alá bukott, úszott sokáig,
> Utána ötven cső hiába lőtt;
> És úszik egy huzamban Anconáig,
> Hol egy halász-tanyán nyer új erőt,
> – Igy mondaná talán el sok regény,
> De kérlek, olvasóm, ne hidd, hogy én.
>
> Tőlem ne várj kaland-okozta lázat;
> Ha borzadályt kivánsz, vérbóditót,
> Ha véred petyhűdt, hogy forgásba rázzad,
> Keress kötéltánczost, czirkust, bitót,
> Vagy nézz el egy Pesten épitte házat,
> S lesd meg, mikor potyog le róla tót,
> S borzadj, ha tetszik ott, de e poéma
> Nem izgató szer, és tintám se' pézsma.
>
> *Then they spotted him, and a whole group of gendarmes*
> *Chased him up to the seashore;*
> *Here he dived into the water, swam for a while,*
> *In vain did fifty pipes shoot after him;*
> *And he swims at a stretch till Ancona,*
> *Where he regains his power on a fisherman's cottage...*
> *– This is how many novels would perhaps tell about it,*
> *But please, my reader, do not think that I would do so.*
>
> *Do not expect adventure-incensed fever of me;*
> *If you wish horror that is narcotic,*
> *If your blood is droopy, look for acrobats, the circus*

Or the gallows to stimulate it;
Or observe a house being built in Pest,
And watch out for the Slovaks to fall down,
And shudder there, if you wish; but this poem
Is not a stimulant, and my ink is no musk either.

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto III, stanzas 9–10)

The first stanza of the above quotation is an imitation up until the last two lines; this imitation, however, is logically and grammatically a perfect continuation of the preceding announcement, as suggested by the first word *majd* 'then' as well. On the other hand, it is stylistically alien to the preceding (and the following) parts, since the default ironic-reflexive tone is replaced by a tone of identification with the events and the hero; this alone makes the part of the text under scrutiny marked. In addition, an accumulation of coordinated clauses is used to express the accumulation of adventures, or rather of the subevents of a single adventure: the depicted events follow one another so closely that they mostly cannot even be separated. However, the narrator separates them artificially, thus creating the impression that he is talking about several successive events, while he really has barely left the point where he started. The best example to illustrate this is the following: the narrator first states that Balázs "dived under water" ("*víz alá bukott*"), then he "swam for a long while" ("*úszott sokáig*"), and then he "swims" ("*úszik*").

In the rapid course of events, all happenings seem to be so much "present" that the narrator suddenly changes from using the past tense into using the present tense, thereby quasi making the narrated events simultaneous with the time of narration and reading. At this point the text contains several redundant elements, which are presented by the narrator as important, clearly in order to achieve a sensational effect and an increased tension on the reader's part; however, this artificial exaggeration, together with the sudden use of the present tense, becomes conspicuous and marked.

Apart from the observed strangeness in style, the narrator explicitly reflects on the divergent nature of the part that ultimately proves to have been an instance of parody. This divergence is accompanied by a value judgement: the kind of literature parodied here becomes ridiculous, and it is considered to be of an aesthetically lower status. In addition, the opposition created by the narrator changes as well: the last two lines of stanza 9 constitute the starting point, where a contrast of literary texts can be observed between the narrator's own text and the group of texts referred to as "many novels" and not specified further.

In the following stanza, the narrator goes even further. Namely, he establishes a link between various sorts of entertainment and the group of texts in question, as well as the reader's potential expectation of the present text to conform to the category of

this group. However, these sorts of entertainment are not only outside the scope of literature, but they belong to the popular/vulgar cultural register; the narrator considers them morbid, especially regarding the construction-site accidents. In this way, the narrator essentially claims that such (potential) expectations on the reader's part are unliterary, as literature is by definition not supposed to satisfy such needs: hence, the "many novels" he mentions are not only poor literature, but strictly speaking they do not even belong to literature.

In this case, parody involves the confrontation with the narrator's text, which is typical for verse novels in general: the narrator presents his own kind of writing as a better alternative, thereby pointing out the impossibility of the parodied genre or text type. The above quotation from *A délibábok hőse* has the following continuation:

Hősöm szökése nem vészes kaland volt;
O szárazon ment s elment szárazon.[10]
Ábrándozó bár, még sem oly bolond volt,
Hogy vizbe szökjék hűvös tavaszon;
Várt alkalomra, mindent jól kigondolt,
Kijátszta a határőrt ravaszon,
S több szenvedés közt bár, mint ő remélte,
Szép május elsején Milánt elérte.[11]

My hero's escape was no pernicious adventure;
He went overland and got away.
Though a dreamer, he was not so foolish
As to jump into water in spring's chill;
He waited for the opportunity, thought over everything well,
Cunningly deluded the frontier-guard,

---

[10] The first word in the line (O) is probably a typo in the 1873 edition: it is the third person singular personal pronoun (in the nominative), and it should read as Ő '(s)he'.

[11] The second line of the stanza contains an untranslatable pun, centred on the word *száraz* 'dry'. The first expression, '*szárazon ment*' (lit. 'he went on dry') refers to the subject going somewhere on mainland: the word *száraz* is a short form standing for *szárazföld* (lit. 'dry land'), which means 'mainland'. By evoking the literal meaning of the word for mainland, a contrast is established between 'dry' and 'mainland' on the one hand, and 'wet' and 'water' on the other hand. The second expression, '*elment szárazon*' (lit. 'he went off dry') is a common metaphoric expression referring to the subject escaping, getting away from something. The text plays around with language by directing the reader's attention to the original literal meaning of established metaphorical expressions and establishing connections between diverse expressions this way. This increases the reflexive quality of the text. I will discuss the exact nature of such reflections in section 4 of this chapter in more detail.

And, though suffering more than he had hoped,
He reached Milano on the beautiful first day of May.

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto III, stanza 11)

As can be seen, the narrator describes Balázs's escape in a rational, realistic way, and this textual variant overwrites the former one. Apart from the newer variant being a negation of the former (both implicitly and rhetorically), the narrator explicitly mentions some arguments that make the version associated with romantic adventure novels untenable.

In sum, it seems that reflexivity is a fundamental property of verse novels. Reflexivity may be related to both layers of the text, either by reflecting on the layer, or by using a point of reflection as a start for distancing away from the actual topic of the text. Of course, the matrix based on the types of textual layers and the ways of reflection is not intended to suggest that there should be four rigid categories, since, as already mentioned, it occurs frequently that a specific locus shows the connection and the interaction of multiple types. Although the examples above show the four basic cases quite clearly, there are many mixed cases, too: for instance, narrators often start with a reflection directly related to the given text and continue with a train of thoughts that ultimately leads away from the particularities thereof.

Hence, the four basic types can be regarded as pivots that mark the field of possible reflections: reflections can target only the diegetic or the extradiegetic level, and, conversely, the manifestation of either level can happen only via reflections. Since verse novels typically show many and manifold reflections from the whole spectrum of possible reflections, it seems especially appropriate to claim that reflections (including also intertextual references) are not accidental or secondary features that prevent the evolution of other generic properties; rather, they are integral and inherent properties of the genre.

2.3 The diegetic level – digressions

Having outlined the narrative structure characteristic of verse novels, I now turn to examining the issue of digressions, primarily concentrating on the mechanism underlying digressions. That is, I will investigate the conditions that have to be satisfied in the text so that digression cen be identified and not merely a remark; furthermore, I will examine how far the notion of digression can be extended so as not to involve examples of topic change.

Digressions can and should be interpreted against the narrated story; hence, they conform to the following pattern: the narrator's task is the linear presentation of the hero's story, and this linearity is interrupted by digressions. Consequently, a major condition for digressions is the presence of a story on the diegetic level that is robust enough for its interruption to be conspicuous: if the story is not visible and definable enough, digressions cannot properly appear, and, together with the actual story, they inevitably blend into the predominantly nonlinear train of thoughts. I will return to this question in the last section of this chapter, when discussing the issue of central and marginal texts. What is important for us now is that digressions are manifest as interruptions, the second condition of which is that the digression has to be robust enough; that is, it has to be able to distance itself from the story both thematically and in length.

2.3.1 Digression versus remarks

In other words, certain gestures from the narrator's part may not be closely related to the story, but this does not automatically imply that these gestures are digressions. The narrator's remarks are very frequent and show considerable variation: these do not forward the story but they do not halt it either. This can be observed in the following part of László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages], where the narrator summarises the childhood of the protagonist Balázs Hűbele:

> Hősöm tehát, kis birtokú apátul
> Falun eredt s korán árván maradt;
> Egy agglegény nagybátyja fogta pártul
> S neveltteté, mint illik urfiat;
> Örökségét nem lopta el csalárdul,
> Mint olykor a népszinműben divat,
> Sőt némi szerzeménnyel is növeszté,
> Balázst pedig szabad fékén ereszté.
>
> *Thus, my hero, the offspring of a father with a small estate,*
> *Was raised in a village and became an orphan early on;*
> *He was adopted by an uncle, a bachelor,*
> *Who educated him as becomes a young gentleman;*
> *He did not steal his inheritance by fraud,*
> *As is sometimes done in folk plays,*

On the contrary, he added to it some acquisition,
And let Balázs go his own way.

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto I, stanza 13)

The sixth line of the stanza quoted above is a remark by which the narrator recalls a cliché of folk plays. This way, the narrator also opens the text for a potential discourse, but this discourse is not entered into, as the narrator returns to the story in the next line. At the same time, the remark is a straightforward intertextual reference, and it is inextricably paired up with a (negative) value judgement from the narrator's part. The gesture of the remark is linked to the possibility of interruption, but ultimately no interruption takes place. The remark fits into the context linguistically, yet it is also distinct from that: in the example above, the remark is a comparative subclause, which is naturally a separate clause; still, it is grammatically attached to a main clause that constitutes an organic part of the story.

Hence, remarks remain fundamentally close to the story, even though they can be considered reflections, as they establish some distance from the text. This can also be observed in the part of József Kiss's *Legendák a nagyapámról* [About my Grandfather] discussed in the previous section, where the narrator creates the impression of writing into a text originally written by his mother:

1843. nov. 30.-án hétfőről keddre virradóra jött a világra elsőszülött fiam, a Józsi. (Az én volnék.) Az isten tartsa meg. A keresztelőjén pompás hevesi görögdinnyét ettünk. (Tessék, a görögdinnyémet is más ette meg!)[12]

On 30th November 1943, in the night from Monday to Tuesday, my first son, Józsi, was born. (That would be me.) May God preserve him. We ate a splendid watermelon from Heves on his christening day. (There you go, even my watermelon was eaten by someone else!)

(József Kiss, *Legendák a nagyapámról*, Édesanyám imádságoskönyvéből [From my mother's prayer book])

In this case, remarks are not only grammatically but also typographically distinct from the rest of the text, as they are included within brackets; this is in line with the property of remarks that the text would be meaningful without them. However, this is not true the other way round: remarks are not independent, and, as the above quotation shows, they contain elements attaching them to the rest of the text: the

[12] As mentioned above, the quoted text is from the first complete edition of 1928.

deictic element *az* 'that' (referring back in the text) or the element *tessék* 'there you go' are typical examples. It is again true that the text opens at the points in question, yet this remains a possibility, as the narrator does not digress.

Digression presupposes a longer deviation; consider the following example from János Vajda's *Találkozások* [Encounters], which starts from the thoughts of the hero, Ernő, who tries to imagine his future life with Etelke after the wedding. Regarding the evoked image of the ideal wife, the narrator says the following:

„Kötény, kanál? Fi donc!" kiált föl
A most divó szokás fia,
Kinek mindjárt az esküvőtől
Külföldre kell utaznia.
S követve e bomfordi bon-tont,
Befutja Svájcot, Párist, Londont.
Megtérve aztán, némelyik
Előkelően kérdedik:[13]

Hogy egy körút, külön, magában
Nem megvetendő élvezet;
A mézes éj, csöndes magányban
Még istenibb gyönyör lehet.
– De ezt a kettőt egybe venni
S egymással őket tönkre tenni,
Igaz, hogy sokba is került, –
De nagyszerüen sikerült.

Minő sivár természetlenség!
– Vándormadárnak szárnya van.
Röpködhet a látképdus kék ég
Mérhetlen távolságiban.
De hogyha párját megtalálja,
Vonul sötét, csöndes magányba,
S elhallgat árnyas ág bogán,
Fészkén a boldog csalogány.

"Apron, spoon? Fi donc!" exclaims
The man of nowadays' fashion,

13 The last word of the line (*kérdedik*) is probably a typo; it should read as *kérkedik* 'boasts'.

Who has to travel abroad
Right after the wedding.
And following this awkward bon-ton,
He runs across Switzerland, Paris, London.
Returning, some of them
Gently boast:

That a round trip, in itself,
Is no small enjoyment;
The joyful night, in peaceful seclusion,
Must be even more of a divine pleasure.
– But to combine these two
And make them destroy each other,
It truly cost quite a lot,
But we managed to do so indeed.

What dreary unnaturalness!
– Migrating birds have wings,
They can fly the immense distances
Of the panoramic blue sky.
But, having found its mate,
The happy nightingale retires
Into dark, peaceful seclusion,
And is silent in its nest among the branches in the shade.

(János Vajda, *Találkozások*, A nyaralóban [In the summer house], stanzas 5–7)

At this point, the narrator extensively digresses on the issue of honeymoons spent abroad, moreover, he also compares various views: the new presented standpoint (stanza 5) is contrasted with a view presented earlier in the text (that is, not the narrator's own view). The narrator then ridicules this option by ironically elaborating on it (stanza 6), and finally he presents his own viewpoint on the subject (stanza 7).

Having thus clarified his own stance, he returns to the thought of the hero:

Ernőnek is, ha szép estennen
Nős életéről képzeleg,
Ülvén Etelkéjével szemben,
Lelkén ily ábrándkép lebeg.
Mit csussza-mássza e világot,
Ki meglelé a boldogságot,

S egy kedves lényben föltalált
Mindent, mi földön üdvöt ád?

Ernő, too, when he imagines his married life
On fine evenings,
Sitting opposite his beloved Etelke,
Sees such pictures in his mind.
Why would one who has found happiness
Go crawling around in the world,
When he has truly found every earthly salvation
In a kind creature?

(János Vajda, *Találkozások*, A nyaralóban [In the summer house], stanza 8)

As can be seen, the narrator returns to the story, since his personal opinions are closely related to those of Ernő's also because they are essentially similar; independently of this, the preceding line of thoughts presented by the narrator diverges from the story more than necessary, since Ernő's views could have been described more concisely.

Digression may involve the narrator's opinion on some topic appearing in the text, but it may also be even more personal. This can be observed in János Arany's *Bolond Istók* [Stephen the Fool], when Istók's blind grandmother asks her daughter, who is lying unconscious on the floor, questions:

Ismételé, de válasz nem jöve
A többször ujra kérdező szavakra:
Az ég villámra villámot löve,
Csak az felelt, isten tüzes haragja;
S nem messze immár lángoló köve
Miatt kigyulván egy nagy szénaboglya
Irtózatos robajjal porraégett...
Intés gyanánt a gazda bűne végett.

Igy, mikor én mindentől elhagyottan
(Tavaly nyáron esett, nem költemény)
Kergetve önnön lelkemtül futottam,
És láthatáromon nem volt remény –
S kétségb'esés örvényeig jutottan
Kezem égre emelni nem merém:

Egy – asztagomba feddőleg hajított –
Villám-üszök imádkozni tanított.

Ekkor (a mondott éjjel, nem tavaly)
Eszmélni látszék az elhalt leány,
Kebléből hosszu és nehéz sohaj
Erőlködött halványkék ajakán;
De a *színt* képzelem csak, mert olaj
Nem volt a mécsben, igy nem láthatám;
Gondolta a mécs, minek égne jobban,
Hol egy vak, egy kisded s egy félhalott van.

He said again, but no answer came
To his repeated questions:
Thunderbolt followed thunderbolt in the sky,
That was the only reply, God's fiery ire;
And not far away, his burning stone has already
Set a large haystack on fire,
Making it burn down with a dire crash…
As an admonishment for the farmer's sin.

So did I, when left alone by all,
(It happened last summer; it is no fiction)
Run, chased by my own soul,
And there was no chance on the horizon –
And, having reached the vortex of despair,
I did not dare raise my hand to heaven:
A lighting brand, thrown as a reproof into my haystack,
Taught me how to pray.

Then (on the aforesaid night, not last year)
The half-dead girl seemed to be regaining consciousness,
From her breast, a long and heavy sigh
Was struggling on her blue lips;
But I only imagine the colour, *for there was*
No oil in the lampion, hence I could not see it;
The lampion thought it was not worth providing more light
Where merely a blind person, a baby, and a half-dead woman were present.

(János Arany, *Bolond Istók*, Canto I, stanzas 32–34)

The event in the story (the haystack catching fire by lightening) and the narrator's experience are connected via association, and they appear next to each other due to their similarity, as shown by the word *így* 'so' at the beginning of stanza 33. At the same time, all this is manifest as a comparison construction, which raises the question what is compared to what exactly; that is, which of the two events constitutes the standard value of comparison (the event with respect to which the other event is interpreted), and which event is compared and is thus in focus. The structure of the text both grammatically and linearly supports the view that the narrator's personal encounter is compared to the events described in stanza 32; in other words, the narrator at this point uses the story in order to communicate details of his own life, thus making the story a secondary, merely functional element.

In stanza 35, the narrator returns to the story; however, this kind of return is different from the one in Vajda's text discussed above: digression in that case involves certain statements that are later fully integrated into the story since they resemble Ernő's thought, while here the personal experience described in the digressive part has no effect on the story. The narrator returns to the story with an abrupt change, thereby unambiguously – and somewhat ironically – separating the two events in question; hence, he implicitly labels the preceding stanza as an instance of digression.

2.3.2 Digression versus topic shift

Digression thus has two fundamental prerequisites: first, the narrator has to distance himself enough from the story, which is therefore interrupted; second, the narrator has to return to the story, thereby emphasising its interruption, also ensuring that a continuation is possible.

If the possibility of continuation is not ensured, the text shows an instance of topic shift rather than simple digression. An interesting example for this is the last canto of Pál Gyulai's *Romhányi* [Romhányi], where the narrator expresses his views concerning the Hungarian war of independence of 1848–1849 (and the subsequent period) in a much more explicit way than formerly, and the actual story is backgrounded. The structure of *Romhányi* in general can be characterised as follows: the main topic is Romhányi's story, in addition to which the war of independence is constantly present as a latent topic; that is, it is not merely a setting for Romhányi's story. The narrator's gestures point to a narrative structure that is built on the dichotomy of utterance versus silence, and which explicitly considers the war of independence as a topic not to be narrated, paradoxically making it a discourse topic of

primary importance (see Bacskai-Atkari 2008). This, however, always remains limited to digressions, as the narrator always returns to Romhányi's story.

By contrast, the last canto sees a turn in terms of what qualifies as a main topic and as a secondary topic. The narrator starts the canto with his thoughts on the war of independence (stanzas 1–3), after which he returns to the story in the following way:

A várkastélyban is gyakorta
A honfi bú megnehezűlt,
A jó kedvet el-elrabolta
S olykor haraggal is vegyült.
Egy-egy új hír a hirlapokban
Vagy Pestről érkezett levél,
És ím a szív új sebbe' dobban,
Az ajk sohajt, hallgat, beszél...
A honfiérzés csordul, árad,
Sok régi emlék fel-feltámad,
S a kandallónál éjfelig
A hosszu est búban telik.

In the mansion, too, the patriot's sorrow
Often weighed heavy,
From time to time taking away high spirits
And sometimes mixing with anger.
Some new tidings in the papers
Or a letter from Pest,
And, Lo! the heart beats with a new rhythm,
The lips sigh, remain silent, talk...
Patriotic feelings pour and flood,
Many old memories arise,
And the long evening, till midnight,
Is passed in sorrow by the fireplace.

(Pál Gyulai, *Romhányi*, Canto IV, stanza 4)

The way the stanza above starts seems to indicate that the general contemplation presented in the previous three stanzas has served to provide a frame for the given point of the story. What follows is a debate embedded in the context of the story in which the guests in the castle, as well as the host (Count Telegdi) and the protagonist

(Count Romhányi), express their viewpoints (stanzas 5–17). The presented viewpoints are stereotypical in the sense that they correspond to the arguments frequently detected in the period; in this way, the debate in the text is integrally related to a more general debate exterior to the text, which was also described at the very beginning of the canto. In other words, it seems that the debate is embedded in the story, which is in turn embedded in a more general context, while the lowest level of the embedding relations (the debate) mirrors the highest level (the general context) quite directly. This suggests that the story might disappear and lose its importance in between these two layers. As I will show below, this is indeed the case.

After the quite long digression presented above, the narrator says the following:

Kossuth Lajost el-eldicsérik
És félistenné emelik,
És Görgeit, a meddig érik,
Egész ördögnek képzelik,
S viszont. – Elmondogatják sorra,
Hogy mit s mit nem tett volna ez,
Amaz, ha épen nem lett volna
És e ha mindent elfedez.
Nem ismétlem, hisz tudjátok jól,
Szóból, könyvekből, hirlapokból.
Még most is foly e régi per,
Szerény lantom nem dönti el.

They sometimes praise Lajos Kossuth
And raise him to a demi-god,
And they imagine Görgei to be
Quite a devil, as much as they can,
And vice versa. – They all enumerate
What this one would not have done –
That one, if just there had not been…
And this "if" obscures everything.
I will not repeat it, since you all know it well,
Having heard it, from books, from the papers.
This old debate is still going on;
My humble lute will not adjudicate.

(Pál Gyulai, *Romhányi*, Canto IV, stanza 18)

At this point, the narrator summarises the gist of the debate, and seems to terminate the digression, referring to the reader's already existing knowledge. If a termination actually came, the reader would truly have to expect an instance of mere digression; however, the next stanza moves further away from the story:

De húrjain olykor megrezdűl
Egy méla hang. Mért nyomjam el?
Habár tudom hiába zendül,
Rá nyájas viszhang nem felel.
A nép bálványt teremt magának,
Ha jó szerencse emeli,
Hisz benne, hisz minden szavának
S mintegy önmását tiszteli,
S ha a balsors csapása éri,
Bálványát akkor is kiméli,
Áldozni bünbakot keres:
Kossuth s Görgei sorsa ez.

Yet, a melancholy note occasionally vibrates
Through its strings. Why should I repress it?
Although I know it sounds in vain,
No gentle echo responds to it.
The people create idols for themselves
When kept high by good fortune,
They believe in him, they believe all his words
And worship him quasi as their likeness,
And when they are plagued by bad fate,
They still spare their idol,
And look for a scapegoat to sacrifice:
This is the fate of Kossuth and Görgei.

(Pál Gyulai, *Romhányi*, Canto IV, stanza 19)

As opposed to previous parts of the text, the narrator now does not suppress his feelings regarding the war of independence (and the figures of Kossuth and Görgei in particular), and he even elaborates on this topic (stanzas 20–22). Finally, he returns to the story in the very last stanza, explicitly reflecting on both the instance of digression and the gesture of returning:

De messze tértem, térjek vissza.
A társaság kifáradott,
Már enyhitő theáját iszsza,
Bevégzé a heves napot.
A nők, kik eddig hallgatának
S csupán tapsoltak olykoron
Egy-egy szónok heves szavának,
Mint hajdan fenn a karzaton,
Pihent ajkkal csevegni kezdnek,
Dicsérnek, szemrehányást tesznek
S pletykálnak is azon felül…
Magyarba oltott németül. stb.

But I am digressing, let me return.
The party has become weary,
They are already drinking their relieving tea,
The passionate day has ended.
The women, who have been still so far
And only clapped occasionally
For some heated words of the speakers,
Like once on the parliament's balcony,
Now start chatting, their lips relaxed,
They praise, they reproach,
Moreover, they gossip…
In Hungarianised German. etc.

(Pál Gyulai, *Romhányi*, Canto IV, stanza 23)

The gesture of returning to the story is thus given, at least theoretically; however, the narrator has in fact moved too far away from the story. It has to be stressed that topic change does not merely occur because the events of the story seem to have taken place during digression, and remain un-narrated, as will be shown in Chapter 3 in connection with Byron's verse novel; this alone would not hamper digression.

The problem primarily stems from the relationship between the explicit topic (Romhányi's story) and the latent topic (the war of independence) turning upside down, as the debate situation given in Canto IV, although theoretically part of the story, serves to provide a frame for the narrator's thoughts, thereby making the story subsidiary to the political issue in question. A perfect return to the story is also hindered because the structure built on the dichotomy of utterance versus silence is

disrupted because the narrator does not silence his thoughts this time, and he thus essentially resolves the previously attested structure.

Regarding digressions, it can be concluded that a given instance of digression has to create an ample distance from the story, while the possibility of a return must also remain. If the gesture of distancing does not affect the process of narration, it is a remark; if it permanently deforms the (thematic) structure of the text, it is a topic change.

2.4 Extradiegetic level – genre parody, language

As I have already explained, many reflections on the extradiegetic level are examples of genre parody. The two most important genres (or genre groups) in this case are the epic and the (prose) novel, which are of course literary antecedents as well. Parody can and should be understood with respect to the text (of a verse novel) in each case; hence, parody immediately affects the linguistic and poetic properties of the text in question, too.

Parody may affect the conventions of certain genres: this typically does not involve a degradation of the genres, but rather highlights a discrepancy between the narrated story and the given conventions. This can be observed in many references to the epic, as for instance in the second stanza of Canto II of János Arany's *Bolond Istók* [Stephen the Fool], see section 2.2, or in the start of Canto III of László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages]:

> Ille ego… ki a cypressi berket
> Bolyongtam eddig s Tempe ligetét:
> Csatákat éneklek, vitézi serget,
> Dobok riajját, harcz rémületét. –
> El, szende Múzsák! Eris, Enyo, jertek;
> Kalliope, áldd meg lantom énekét,
> Tárd föl szememnek e sok tarka képet,
> Torzot s valót, rútat s eszményi szépet.

> *Ille ego… I, who have so far wandered about*
> *In the cypress groves and the bosket of Tempe:*
> *I sing about battles, a valiant army,*
> *The din of drums, the terror of combat. –*

Away, meek Muses! Come, Eris, Enyo;
Bless my lute, Calliope,
Let my eyes see these many colourful pictures,
Distorted and real, ugly and of ideal beauty.

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto III, stanza 1)

In this case, imitating the epic is not an instance of parody in itself: however, it becomes such when contrasted with the actual status depicted later.

On the other hand, parody may affect specific ways of text formation as well: this is the predominant pattern concerning the romantic novel; examples of this may be accompanied by imitation (for examples, in stanzas 9–11 of Canto III of *A délibábok hőse*), but it may merely involve reflection on the reader's expectations as well. The narrator of Pál Gyulai's *Romhányi* [Romhányi] adopts the latter method at the point of the story when Romhányi is on the run after the war of independence was subdued. He happens to find shelter in the house of Ilonka, whom he had previously courted and later abandoned. However, he is so exhausted at the very moment of their supposed reunion that he is unconscious:

De rá nem ismer, oly nagy láza,
S ismét behunyja a szemét…
Hát ily sovány regényem váza,
S mily prózai, szokott beszéd.
Jó olvasóm, tán igy fogsz szólni,
Ki vártál nagy jelenetet,
Romhányi hogy' fog szónokolni…
Nem kínozom a beteget.
Ha nagy, csodás és szörnyü szép kell,
A Jókai regényét nyisd fel;
Én ezt meg nem tanulhatám,
Nincs hozzá sok phantasiám.

But he does not recognise her, so high is his fever,
And he closes his eyes again…
So meagre is the skeleton of my novel,
And what prosaic, common speech.
My dear reader, so will you perhaps speak,
Having expected a great scene,
How Romhányi would orate…

I will not torture the patient.
If you need something great, miraculous and terribly beautiful,
Open Jókai's novels;
I could not learn this,
I have not much phantasy for it.

(Pál Gyulai, *Romhányi*, Canto II, stanza 36)

Explicit criticism targets Jókai's novels on the one hand, and readers' expectations on the other hand. In this view, Jókai's literary method is identified as the featuring of unlikely events, while the narrator's own strategy is deemed undoubtedly superior, for the simple reason that it is more realistic, and, taking into consideration the paradox of making a character speak, it is also more humane. Such reflections are of course closely related to the diegetic level of the text, too, since there is a link to the narrated story: however, unlike reflections primarily targeting the diegetic level, the comments made here are not merely connected to various parts of the story, but the story is seen as a construct created by the narrator.

Apart from the thematic aspect of the alienating gesture in the above quotation, there is also a linguistic concern: the style of the text is referred to as "prosaic" and "usual", hence as a text closer to everyday language than to what is associated with a poetic and literary language. Verse novels quite often display references to the linguistic shape of the text: in addition to explicit reflections, the very fact that the text is written in verse also plays a role, since various components, such as rhyme structure, are able to direct the reader's attention to the linguistic form in question. In other words, reflections on the extradiegetic level frequently highlight otherwise unmarked forms, thereby interrupting the reading process. Such examples may affect both literary forms and linguistic forms (such as set phrases). Consider the following example, in which the narrator of János Vajda's *Találkozások* [Encounters] describes Etelke:

Tehát elvégre… a dologra!…
Ünnep, tizenkettő után
Álljunk ki itt e zsibsarokra,
Itt lép el a sok szép leány.
És itt jön ő… Segits Apolló!
Szeme bogár, a fürtje holló…
De mit beszélek – irgalom!
Hisz ez merő gúny, szidalom!

Holló, bogár… hisz feketének
Fekete egykép mindenik.

Hanem bizony némák, szegények,
Már legalább is színeik.
De ezek a fürtök – beszélnek;
E szép szemek tüzet lövelnek.
Mely valamint a csatatüz
Öl, perzsel vagy rabszíjra füz.

Hence, after all… let us start!
It is a holiday, after noon,
Let us stand at this corner,
All the pretty girls pass here.
And here she comes… Help, Apollo!
Her eyes are black as beetles, her hair black as a raven…
But what do I say? Alas!
This is mere jest and insult!

Raven, beetle… they are,
Of course, both black.
However, they are mute and poor,
At least their colours.
But these locks – they speak;
These beautiful eyes have fire,
Which, like the fires on a battlefield,
Kills, scorches or binds captive.

(János Vajda, *Találkozások*, A Váci utcán [In Váci street], stanzas 15–16)

Comparing dark eyes to beetles and black hair to the colour of ravens is quite clichéd in Hungarian poetic (or semi-poetic) language: such metaphors are not original, and, more importantly, using or encountering them does not truly evoke the denotative, non-metaphorical meaning of either the word *beetle* (Hungarian: *bogár*) or *raven* (Hungarian: *holló*). However, the retrospective reflection on the narrator's part precisely calls attention to this non-metaphorical, or even pre-metaphorical, meaning, thereby deconstructing the metaphor originally used for the description of the female character (Etelke), while to some extent, he deconstructs metaphorical language use, the possibility and the authority thereof.

Moreover, it is not merely the blackness of the raven and the beetle that is activated, but also the animals, the blackness of which is relevant to a certain extent; however, in metaphorical language, their original integrity is lost, since metaphors

highlight only a single property that is relevant in terms of its similarity to something else. First, the narrator acknowledges that ravens and beetles are black: hence, the property constituting the essence of comparison is reduced to the attribute of the aforementioned animals. Second, by mentioning the issue of *muteness* (Hungarian: *némaság*) the narrator in fact activates a muteness in the pre-metaphoric sense (that is, the muteness of the animals themselves). This is also indicated by the fact that he immediately overwrites the pre-metaphoric meaning when rectifying himself, going back to the metaphoric mood and explicitly stating that the colours of the animals are mute (that is, not the animals themselves). Third, the raven-metaphor and the beetle-metaphor are certainly mute in the sense that they are clichéd, and hence close to being dead metaphors.

The present investigation of course cannot venture to address the issue of how the notions of metaphor, catachresis and dead metaphor would apply precisely in this case (cf. Parker 2004, among others, for an in-depth study on their separation). What is important for us here is that the narrator explicitly thematises certain conventionalised linguistic expressions, and, in this sense, the exact material of the text becomes the subject of the text itself, too. In this way, reflections on the extradiegetic level may target not only literary forms but also linguistic forms, calling attention to both the literary nature and the linguistic shape of the text.

Apart from the kind of explicit reflection demonstrated by the excerpt above, this can become manifest in the form of juxtaposing different linguistic elements. The following example from Vajda's *Találkozások* shows an instance of this: the preceding stanzas describe that the hero, Ernő, kisses the shoulder of Etelke, who becomes extremely frightened, and Ernő hastily proposes to her. The narrator then says the following:

> Lesímul a vihar; Etelke
> Még ujra megbotránkozik;
> Mig szép nyakára s a történtre –
> Duzzogva bár – fátyolt borít.
> Meglepetése, hányatása
> Egy indulatból át a másba
> Oly ellentétes, hirtelen,
> Hogy most itélni képtelen.
>
> *The storm passes; Etelke is*
> *Now and then still outraged;*
> *Till – though sulking – she cast a veil*
> *On her pretty neck and on what happened.*

> *Her surprise, her being cast*
> *From one emotion to another*
> *All is so conflicting and sudden,*
> *That she cannot decide at the moment.*
>
> (János Vajda, *Találkozások*, A Váci utcán [In Váci street], stanza 69)

The point of language game lies in the narrator juxtaposing two linguistic expressions, whereby the mere gesture of juxtaposition also creates a contrast between the two. The first one ("Etelke casts a veil on her neck", Hungarian: "Etelke fátyolt borít a nyakára") is literal, hence belonging to pre-metaphoric language use; the second one ("Etelke casts a veil on what happened", Hungarian: "Etelke fátyolt borít a történtekre") is of course metaphorical, and again exhibits a strongly conventionalised metaphor. The pre-metaphorical expression here makes the metaphorical expression appear ironic, by highlighting both the metaphorical nature and the original, authentic meaning of the latter. The ultimate humorous effect thus results from the contact of the two expressions and from the added effect emerging from reading them juxtaposed; not to mention the obvious fact that the two expressions are linguistically very close and allow for such a poetic feat.[14]

Considering all this, it can be concluded that reflections on the extradiegetic level in verse novels have two basic types. The first type directs the reader's attention to the literariness of the text, and, related to this, it compares the given text to other genres, works and/or literary conventions and tendencies; this becomes frequently manifest in the form of explicit genre parody, especially that of the epic and romantic (prose) novels. The second type highlights the linguistic properties of the text: this type may directly concern the language of the text, but it may also address quite general issues of language, like the relation between everyday and poetic language, or the use of metaphors.

2.5 Writing as a creative process

As shown in the previous section, reflections on the extradiegetic level of the text are crucial in the verse novel; one potential aspect is the topicalisation of the writing process. Such narrative gestures typically serve to create the illusion that the narrator is able to address the reader and the reading audience in a direct way, thereby evoking gestures of spoken conversation, and generally a communicative situation in which the narrator and the reader(s) are co-present in terms of space and time.

[14] A similar instance was pointed out in connection with László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* in section 2 of this chapter; see the corresponding discussion there.

Nonetheless, the text is of course written in nature, which is also acknowledged by the narrator; in this way, a contrast arises between the nature of the text and the previously mentioned gestures.

In fact, the only interface where the narrator and the reader may meet is the text. A given text may create the impression that the author, understood now as the real, biographical author, is in direct contact with the readers, and thus uses the text merely as a tool to address his audience. From a theoretical perspective, of course, what happens is rather an interaction of the implied author and the implied readers within the text. Since these questions have been extensively discussed in the literature, I do not wish to elaborate on the distinctions between the various terms and on their interrelatedness any further. The notions of the "implied author" and the "implied reader" go back to Wayne C. Booth (Booth 1961); regarding the implied author, similar views were expressed in Tynyanov's 1927 work (Tynyanov 1971), and partly by other Russian formalists (see Gölz 2009); see also Genette (1983), Chatman (1978, 1990), Bronzwaer (1978). Regarding the implied reader, see Prince (1971), Schmid (1973), Iser (1972, 1976, 1978).

The present investigation does not wish to prove that the notions are applicable to the verse novel either, given that they can be applied to any (narrative) text. The reason why the notions are particularly important for the verse novel is that verse novels typically reflect on related issues. Hence, while many gestures in a given text identify the narrator as the poet, or address specific people (for instance, other poets), other parts of the same text contradict these gestures, and explicitly reject the possibility of such immediate connections.

Evoking the archetypical situation in which the poet presents the story in front of his recipients is not an invention of the verse novel. As will be shown later, Mihály Vörösmarty had similar gestures in Hungarian literature (Chapter 5), and, as far as English literature is concerned, Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* or Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* can be mentioned (see Chapter 3). However, apart from evocation, verse novels do not provide a frame story that would classify the embedded text as an oral performance: on the contrary, narrators of verse novels reflect on the process of writing, too, as is shown by the ending of Canto I of *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages]:

Hősünk negédes, elbizott szivébe
A dévaj isten, e pajkos kujon,
Álarcz alatt magát igy fészkelé be,
Nem kérdve, hogy szállást kap-é vajon?
S midőn utóbb nyilt arczczal is kilépe,
Nem volt idő segitni a bajon;

Miként mindezt leirom majd alább,
De mára tán elég e vers-nyaláb.

So did the puckish god, this prankish ribald,
Nestle himself into the demure, pretentious heart of our hero,
Wearing a mask,
Not asking whether he would be lodged?
And when he finally stepped out showing his real face,
There was no time for remedy;
As I will describe it all below,
But this bundle of verse will be enough for today.

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto I, stanza 82)

The narrator refers to a part of the text that will follow and is thus not yet known by the reader; moreover, it is not yet written: the process of writing and the reflection on it are simultaneous; hence, it is not an instance of editing a text previously written. In addition, the impression of a strongly edited text is undermined by the reflection on the writing process not being separated from the narration of the actual story: the narrator's meta-textual thoughts are part of the text just as the story is. This makes the text speech-like, while reflections on the writing process stress its written nature.

The above reflection of the narrator suggests that the interruption of the writing process involves the interruption of the reading process: the reader is supposed to wait since the narrator suspends the narration, at least for the same day. Such gestures create a caesura in the text that does not directly follow from the dynamics of the narrated story, and is artificial in this sense; however, from the point of view of the writing process, such caesuras are natural, since the structure of the text mirrors the divisions of this process. The resulting structure is thus partly arbitrary and does not follow established conventions of composition.

Reflections on the writing process are often paradoxical; this is exemplified by the following stanza of József Kiss's *Legendák a nagyapámról* [About my Grandfather]:

S a kapun, merre távozott az ősöm,
Nagy infernalis pompával belépe
– Ki tort ül gyengén és tort ül erősön –
Sátán, az ur, ő pokoli felsége!
Mily jó, hogy irháját féltette hősöm,
Különben ide irhatnám, hogy *Vége* –
És nagyapámról nem szólna más ének
Mint az, a melyet a szelek regélnek.

> *And through the gate, where my ancestor had left,*
> *With great infernal pageantry,*
> *Satan entered, the lord, his hellish majesty,*
> *He, who has a funeral feast over the weak and the strong!*
> *How nice that my ancestor was in a blue funk,*
> *Otherwise I would have to write* The End *here –*
> *And there would be no song about my grandfather*
> *Other than the one told by the winds.*
>
> (József Kiss, *Legendák a nagyapámról*, Canto V, stanza 6)

It is clear from the preceding stanza that the hero, Reb Mayer Litvák (the narrator's grandfather; "Reb" stands for rabbi) has fled from an anti-Jewish pogrom in the Russian Empire. Reflecting on this, the narrator in the stanza above calls attention to the possibility of an interruption of the writing process: had Reb Mayer Litvák not escaped, the writing process would have to terminate, given that there would be no hero to write about. On the one hand, the narrator's gesture stresses that the text is just being created. On the other hand, his hypothesis is paradoxica: had Reb Mayer Lipták's life ended at the point in question, he would not have had children either; hence, neither his grandson (the narrator himself) not the text would exist. Consequently, the text could naturally not be interrupted.

This conclusion can clearly be drawn from the preceding parts of the text (e.g., it is clear that Reb Mayer Litvák has no offspring at the given point of the story); in addition, the narrator points to to the same conclusion in the last two lines of the quotation given above. This reference, however, does not at the least remove the paradox, but rather strengthens it further; the reference starts with the conjunction *and* (Hungarian: *és*), hence it is conjoined with the paradox, instead of overwriting it. At the same time, the paradox stresses the interdependency between the narrator-author and Reb Mayer Litvák: the narrator as an author is dependent on Reb Mayer Litvák as a person, while Reb Mayer Litvák as the hero of the story is dependent on his own grandson as the narrator of that story.

Reflections on the process of writing are thus in conflict with the fact that the text has already been written, as well as with those reflections of the narrator that treat the given text as a finished product, as will be shown in the following section. On the other hand, reflections on the process of writing may be in conflict with each other, too, since writing as a process is not only connected to the text, but also to the meta-textual playing field evoked in the text in which the narrator as an authorial figure exists (or does not exist).

2.6 Writing as a product

Apart from the process of writing, verse novels often reflect on the product of writing; that is, on the text understood as an artefact (a book). From the author-narrator's perspective, this becomes manifest in his plans concerning the final shape of the text; from the readers' perspective, the book is understood as an object that they factually hold in their hands.

The explicit presence of the author's plans is possible because, as pointed out in the previous section, the narrator and the implied author are closely tied together, and the narrator unambiguously positions himself as the writer of the text and not as, for instance, the editor thereof. The book as an artefact is, at the same time, very consciously present in verse novels, and matters of composition and publication may be just as important for the narrator as minor questions concerning the text.

Regarding the topicalisation of composition, József Kiss's *Legendák a nagyapámról* [About my Grandfather] provides an excellent example. The authorial introduction *Útravaló* [Provisions for the journey] already reflects on the nature and structure of the actual work, while it also forms part of the latter; the two are not sharply separated, chiefly due to the shared playful and ironic tone. In between the introduction and the core text, the part entitled *Édesanyám imádságoskönyvéből* [From my mother's prayer book] constitutes an interesting transition. As far as its topic is concerned, it seems to belong to the core text, while in fact it contains the entries of the narrator-author's parents (and in some cases the narrator's personal reflections on these), and the narrator-author's comments before each of the entries. Regarding its function, it is also hybrid, since the text arguably starts already at this point, while the actual start of the text is projected, since it is explicitly claimed that the narrator's text emerges from the entries published here:

> Ezekből a feljegyzésekből, ebből a rozsdalepett miliőből merítettem költeményem tárgyát, színeit, motivumait.
>
> *It was from these notes and from this rusty milieu that I drew the subject, the colours, and the motives of my poem.*
>
> (József Kiss, *Legendák a nagyapámról*, Édesanyám imádságoskönyvéből [From my mother's prayer book])

As is obvious from subsequent parts of the text, drawing inspiration from the presented material means that the narrator expands the events found in the prayer book. In this sense, the part *Édesanyám imádságoskönyvéből* is a miniature version of

the entire text, not only concerning the narrated story, but also regarding the mood of narration, since the narrator's remarks are quite similar to the ones found in the text later. In other words, this intermediate part contains not only raw material but rather a draft, which delimits the planned text in the sense that it defines what will next be presented to the reader as a finished text: as the past tense of the verb *merítettem* 'I drew' clearly shows, the text is already finished. This is in line with the fact that the part *Édesanyám imádságoskönyvéből* was not part of the first (1911) edition but was included only in the posthumous 1928 edition; still, its relative position within the intended full text is clearly not that of a meta-introduction but a significantly more embedded par; hence, the questions and potential controversies arise. Such references to a completed structure are of course in conflict with gestures that refer to writing as a process, which may create tension in the text. In the case of *Legendák a nagyapámról*, there is in part a functional split between the introductory sections and the core text; however, this is not complete either, since even the introductory part contains remarks suggesting that the writing process is going on, just as the core text contains references to the work as a whole.

The ending of Canto I of Pál Gyulai's *Romhányi* [Romhányi] shows an explicit reference to the book format in relation to the reader; at this point, the narrator describes the flight of the hero, Romhányi:

Nyomába jőnek a zsandárok,
Nagy volt rá nézve a veszély,
De megsegíté a jó árok
És a korom-sötétü éj.
Futott, futott, bár nagyon fáradt
És beteges, kiéhezett…
De, olvasóm, ezer bocsánat!
Itt megszakítom könyvemet.
Mert kifáradtam én is immár,
Üld engem is sok durva zsandár:
Sokféle gondok és bajok,
Csak néha, lopva irhatok.

He was chased by the gendarmes,
He was in great peril,
But a good trench aided him,
As did the pitch-dark night.
He ran, he ran, though very tired

And weak, starved…
But, my reader, a thousand apologies!
I have to interrupt my book here.
For I have become weary myself, too,
I am also chased by many crude gendarmes:
Several problems and troubles,
I can only write occasionally and in secret.

(Pál Gyulai, *Romhányi*, Canto I, stanza 61)

Reflecting on the text as a product in the form of a book is not only manifest in the narrator's explicit way of calling the text a *book* (Hungarian: *könyv*), but also in the appearance of the reader, who obviously has access to the text only when it is in the form of a book. The way of interrupting the text is quite similar to what the ending of Canto I of László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages]; this phenomenon will be examined in detail in section 8 of the present chapter.

What is important at this point is that the narrator, when referring to the circumstances of writing, says that he has to interrupt not only the writing process but also the book. Of course, if the book appears in sequels, it is possible that the entire work is larger than the text contained in a single book. However, this is not the case for *Romhányi*, and even if it were, it would not resolve the paradox created in the text. Namely, the caesura implied by the narrator is not visible to the reader if the interruption of the writing process is meant, since the text continues in the next canto (which is part of the same book); consequently, interruption concerns writing only, not reading. On the other hand, if the end of the canto coincides with that of the current book, the narrator does not interrupt the book but rather the writing of the entire work, which he will return to only in the next book; in this case, interruption affects the reading process as well.

The representation of the text as a book is hence, among other reasons, important because it necessarily interacts with other types of reflections concerning writing, and the conflicts resulting from such interactions contribute to the network of reflections fundamentally characteristic of the narrative structure of verse novels.

2.7 Reading as a hypothetical process

Following this line of thought, the fact that the narrator reflects on both the reader(s) and the reading process raises further questions; in particular, how the text can contain information regarding the reading process. Verse novels very frequently display references to the reader's potential reactions to the text or certain passages: reaction is in each case understood as an act involving the reader actively reacting to what (s)he is just reading. Such reactions may be verbal and nonverbal, both involving the hypotheses of the narrator. A certain hypothesis may be based on previous reactions of the readership; still, the mechanism behind it is the following: the narrator, immediately after finishing a given part of the text, hypothesises some reception, and when later he seems to dispute with the reader (or the reading public), he actually reacts to his own hypothesis. As might be expected, the narrator typically hypothesises negative reactions on the reader's part.

The reader's reaction is frequently displayed as a verbal reaction; this is exemplified by a certain part of Pál Gyulai's *Romhányi* [Romhányi] quoted before, where the protagonist Romhányi has fever and does not recognise Ilonka:

De rá nem ismer, oly nagy láza,
S ismét behunyja a szemét…
Hát ily sovány regényem váza,
S mily prózai, szokott beszéd.
Jó olvasóm, tán igy fogsz szólni,
Ki vártál nagy jelenetet,
Romhányi hogy' fog szónokolni…
Nem kínozom a beteget.
Ha nagy, csodás és szörnyü szép kell,
A Jókai regényét nyisd fel;
Én ezt meg nem tanulhatám,
Nincs hozzá sok phantasiám.

But he does not recognise her, so high is his fever,
And he closes his eyes again…
So meagre is the skeleton of my novel,
And what prosaic, common speech.
My dear reader, so will you perhaps speak,
Having expected a great scene,
How Romhányi would orate…

I will not torture the patient.
If you need something great, miraculous and terribly beautiful,
Open Jókai's novels;
I could not learn this,
I have not much phantasy for it.

(Pál Gyulai, *Romhányi*, Canto II, stanza 36)

In lines 3 and 4, the narrator provides a text that he attributes to the reader, and which is a reaction to the first two lines. As pointed out in section 4 of this chapter, the conflict arises from the difference between the kind of literature represented by the narrator, and the kind of Romantic literature associated with Mór Jókai. Apart from being different, the two are also ordered in a hierarchical fashion, where the kind of literature represented by the narrator is claimed to be better; hence, the reader's expectations are ridiculed.

The hypothetical nature of the reader's reaction is made explicit in the text, too. The narrator uses the word *tán* 'perhaps', and puts the reporting clause ("*tán így fogsz szólni*" 'so will you perhaps speak') into the future; hence, he associates it with a temporal dimension that he clearly has no influence on as he does not know whether the reader will actually produce such a text. What he can do is prepare an appropriate answer for this possibility, and this is what he communicates indeed. It is also worth noting that the text of the reader is not distinguished rigorously from that of the narrator. The example above is not an instance of direct quotation, which is not only shown by the absence of quotation marks but is also grammatically encoded, since the possessive marking on the word *regényem* 'my novel' suggests that the statement is pronounced by the narrator. Hence, in a slightly paradox way, the reader seems to receive a text edited (potentially enhanced or rather destructed) by the narrator, which the same claims to originate from the reader, if at all the text-creating act has been performed by the reader.

In this sense, the beginning of János Vajda's *Találkozások* [Encounters] is definitely closer to a real dialogue:

A váci utcán, fényes délben,
Ugy fél tizenkettő után…
– Szép olvasónő a vidéken
Ez prózai neked talán?
„A váci utcán, hol a sarkon,
Mint jelfa a keresztúti parton,
A rendbiztos mereven áll…
Haha… gyönyörü ideál!"

In Váci street, midday,
After half past eleven...
– Fair lady reader in the countryside,
Is this perhaps too prosaic for you?
"In Váci street, where the policeman
Is standing on the corner,
As a signpost at the crossroads...
Haha... a charming ideal!"

(János Vajda, *Találkozások*, A Váci utcán [In Váci street], stanza 1)

Again, just as in Gyulai's verse novel, the narrator's text seems to be interrupted after the first two lines: first, due to the narrator, who suddenly turns to the female reader's potential thoughts, and then, by the female reader. Interruption is stronger here than in the case of *Romhányi*, partly because it is the very beginning of the entire text, and partly because the (female) reader's text is clearly dominant in terms of quantity. The narrator uses only two lines to introduce the setting of the story, while the next two lines are devoted to his reaction towards the reader. By contrast, the reader not only has the four lines quoted above, but she is quasi the one writing the next stanza, too:

„És bekiséri kérlelhetlen,
Ha valaki nagyot kiált.
Ugyan mi történhetnék itten
Vasárnap déltájban kivált?
Midőn a boltok zárva sorba,
A tolvaj alszik a lebujba;
Sörházban a filiszterek,
S nem kódorog cipészgyerek?"

"And ruthlessly takes into custody
Whoever shouts loud.
What could possibly happen here
Especially on a Sunday, about noon?
When all the shops are closed,
The thieves are sleeping in the joints;
The philistines are in the beer house,
And no cobbler-boys are loitering around?"

(János Vajda, *Találkozások*, A Váci utcán [In Váci street], stanza 2)

In this way, the reader appears to dominate the text for quite a while; moreover, she even parodies the original text of the narrator. The very beginning of the female reader's text is identical to that of the narrator's, but the rest of the narrator's text is absorbed and overwritten by the (female) reader's text and embedded in a fundamentally mocking context. At the same time, the reader's text is also mockingly embedded in the narrator's text. It is worth mentioning that Vajda's narrator at this point clearly addresses a female reader. This can partly be attributed to the fact that readers in the period were primarily females (see Gyáni 2007: 569); on the other hand, it spells out a contemporary view that women were primarily readers of texts belonging to the popular register (see Gyáni 2007: 569; György 1886: 330). The parody affecting the female reader here is thus also generic, since it affects an entire group of society, while it retains a specific aspect as well, targeting only a group of potential readers. The text produced by the reader assigns an individual character to the figure of the female reader.

Reclaiming the text from the reader starts in the next stanza, in which the narrator, reacting to the opinion of the female reader, says the following:

> Valóban, kedves olvasónő,
> Nem vadregényes ez a tér.
> A sziklabérces vadonerdő
> Festőibb szinpadot igér.
> De mindazáltal én azt mondom,
> Kissé időzhetnénk e ponton.
> Mert legyen a keret mi szép,
> Mégis csak a mi fő, a kép.
>
> *Indeed, dear lady reader,*
> *This setting is not romantic.*
> *The wild forest with its cliffs*
> *Would promise a more picturesque scene.*
> *However, I nevertheless say*
> *That we should linger on at this spot.*
> *Because, no matter how beautiful the frame is,*
> *What really matters is the picture, after all.*
>
> (János Vajda, *Találkozások*, A Váci utcán [In Váci street], stanza 3)

The narrator partly agrees with the (female) reader, but he also starts enumerating counter-arguments. He continues doing so in the following stanzas: the reader's expectations thus ultimately appear somewhat ridiculous and inadequate.

At the same time, the reader's text is of course strictly hypothetical as well and is introduced by the word *tán* 'perhaps' from the narrator's part (in stanza 1); still, the narrator, as clearly shown by stanza 3, contests these (hypothetical) arguments. The line of reasoning given by the narrator essentially serves to convince the reader that the setting of the story may host romantic events, even if it is not romantic in general. This kind of argumentation is different from the one that can be observed in *Romhányi*: it is true in both cases that the reader's expectations are not satisfied in some sense. However, while Gyulai's narrator makes the relevant expectations appear as ridiculous and strongly opposes them by claiming his own text to be of a better quality, the narrator of *Találkozások* mocks his reader only in part.

This is the case because he aims at demonstrating that the text will in fact match the reader's expectations, even though not by using an apparatus familiar to the reader. That is, if the (female) reader expects a romantic story in a setting which is traditionally regarded as romantic, she is now urged to expect the romantic story in a setting which is traditionally not regarded as romantic but which the text will show to be so. As the narrator ultimately wishes to comply with the reader's expectations, it makes sense that the reader's quasi-poetic performance becomes more prominent than that of the narrator, at least temporarily.

It is worth mentioning that prototypical verse novels are more likely to contain gestures similar to the one in *Romhányi*, that is, the mocking of the reader's expectations. This can be observed in Canto III, stanzas 9–10 of László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages], see section 2 of this chapter: the narrator, parodying romantic adventure novels, ridicules the reader's expectations, which in his view should be satisfied by other forms of entertainment (such as the circus). The non-prototypical nature of *Találkozások* will be discussed in section 9in detail (see also Bacskai-Atkari 2009).

Another question in this respect concerns the extent to which the reading act as a performance is assigned textual space: while in the case of *Találkozások* it constitutes a straightforwardly dominant, separate part of the text, the narrator of *Romhányi* embeds the reader's hypothetical text in his own. An even stronger example of embedding can be observed in the final stanza of Gyula Reviczky's *Szeptember* [September]:

Avagy csupán látszott hídegnek,
S vulkán forrott a hó alatt?
A néma, zárkozott sziveknek
[...]
Oh ők is álmodnak, szeretnek
Kérek csupán egy kis türelmet

[…]
Midőn már elkésett vele.[15]

Or he merely seemed to be cold,
And maybe a volcano was boiling underneath the snow?
Silent, introvert hearts
[…]
Oh, they too dream and love
I just ask for some patience
[…]
When he was too late with it.

(Gyula Reviczky, *Szeptember,* fragment 5, stanza 4)

As is clear from the narrator's reaction in lines 5–6, lines 1–4 display the reader's questions; the narrator answers these by partly acknowledging that the questions are on the right track, and by asking the reader to be patient for a while. This gesture indicates that the (strictly hypothetical) question stems from a person (or persons) other than the narrator, and it is not merely a rhetorical device where the subject asking the question would be the narrator or at least would be incorporated in the

15 The quoted text is taken from the 2007 critical edition of Reviczky's oeuvre (the date of this fragment is unknown). The stanza, just like the entire text, is unfinished, yet the semantic content can be deduced both from the rest of the stanza and from the preceding context. An early reconstructed version is included in the 1900 (posthumous) edition; this is given below:

Avagy csupán látszott hidegnek,
S vulkán forrott a hó alatt?
Vagy nem lehet az ily sziveknek
Érezni titkolt vágyakat?
Nem! Ők is álmodnak, szeretnek;
Kérek csupán egy kis türelmet:
Andrásnak is kitört heve, –
Midőn már elkésett vele.

In verbatim translation:

Or he merely seemed to be cold,
And maybe a volcano was boiling underneath the snow?
Or cannot such hearts
Feel secret desires?
No! They too dream and love;
I just ask for some patience:
András's passion erupted as well –
When he was too late with it.

propositions. Naturally, this does not alter the fact that the question is not completely distinct from the narrator's text up until the gesture of alienation, and, related to this, it is obvious that the reader's figure is not articulated.

What is important here is that verse novels contain several references to potential reactions on the reader's part, which is closely related to the general property of reflexivity that characterises the structure of verse novels, as described in the present chapter. From time to time, the narrator interrupts storytelling for the sake of reflecting on his own text (either on the diegetic or on the extradiegetic level); directly initiating a dialogue with the reader is essentially only one further step away. Since the reader by default has access to the text only after it has been published, interactions with the reader often revolve around the book, and, related to this, the narrator's plans concerning the book. In addition, the reader's opinion may be assigned textual space; if so, the reader's thoughts, as imagined and constructed by the narrator, constitute a text-creating act, just as the narrator's text.

2.8 Special points of the text

Adopting the view that reflexivity is a fundamental characteristic of the narrative structure of verse novels, the question arises whether there are certain typical points in the text where reflections (and therefore the manifestation of the underlying structure) appear.

It is of course true that reflections may appear at any point of the text, which makes them crucial in terms of reception as well: the narrator may interrupt narrating the story (or other lines of thoughts) at any point in an arbitrary fashion. This is exemplified by the following part of László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages], where the protagonist, Balázs, leaves his former troop of fellow university students:

> Ott hagyja őket, víg zajtól követve,
> Kedélye bomlott, lelke bús, setét;
> Azok köréből van tehát kivetve,
> Kikért od' adta volna mindenét.
> Mit? Arra volna ő csupán születve,
> Hogy korhelyek közt töltse életét?
> Igy áporog fojtott dühvel magába',
> És elvonúl, mint sebzett vad, magányba.

He leaves them, followed by their merry din,
His mood is degraded, his soul is sad and dark;
Is he then expelled from the circle of those
For whom he would have given everything?
What? Was he then born just
To spend his life among rakes?
So, he rampages in himself with repressed anger,
And retreats, like a wounded game, into solitude.

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto I, stanza 32)

At this point, the narrator takes the opportunity to digress on solitude in a lyrical tone:

Szép a magány, ha kedvet a világban
Nem lelve a szív, félre menekül;
Szép a magány – annak ki nincs magában,
Bár emberektől távol s egyedül;
Midőn, az ábrándok szép korszakában,
A lélek oly fennen, bátran repül,
S teremt magának oly szellemvilágot,
A mely benépesit egy pusztaságot.

Szép a magány, ha lelkünk önmagával,
Önistenével elmerengni tud;
Hő nyári nap, erdőn, hol lomb beárnyal,
Hová az ember elbolyongva jut,
Szél-rezgetett lomb játszik a sugárral,
Mely szökve néhol a mély árnyba fut,
Nincs semmi nyilt zaj, nem válik ki hang,
Csak a rovar-világ zsummog, zsibong.

Solitude is bliss, when the heart, not finding
Pleasure in the world, runs away;
Solitude is bliss – for who is not lonely,
Albeit far from people and by himself;
When, in the beautiful era of dreams,
The soul flies so high, so bravely,
And creates for himself a spiritual world
That would populate a desert.

Solitude is bliss, if your soul can
Muse with itself, with its own god;
A hot summer day, in the forest, where the foliage provides shadow,
Where people arrive after wandering,
The branches moved by the wind play with the beams
That sometimes playfully runs into the deepest shadow,
There is no upfront noise, no sound can be discerned,
Only the insect-world is whirling and buzzing.

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto I, stanzas 33–34)

This instance of digression does not move substantially away from the story of Balázs, since the description presented in the quotation above may well be applicable to Balázs's actual life situation as well. However, the following stanza exhibits a way of digression which departs from the story and draws attention to the narrator:

Szép a magány. Ah én is élvezem:
Az éj leszállt, az utczazaj kihalt;
Kedves költőimet előveszem,
Emlékbe híva egy-egy régi dalt,
Merengve, csendesen lapoz kezem,
Felejtem a mindennapos zsibajt,
És lelkem egy eszmény-világba száll át…
Jaj, jaj, – csak a szomszéd ne verne skálát.

Solitude is bliss. Ah, I enjoy it, too:
The night has fallen, the street noise has died away;
I turn to my dear poets,
Recalling some old songs,
My hand turns the pages musingly and quietly,
I forget the everyday clamour,
And my soul is transferred to a world of ideals…
Alas! – if only my neighbour would stop playing scales!

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto I, stanza 35)

The stanza above foregrounds the narrator's persona, at the same time directing the reader's attention to the constructed nature of the text; however, the elegiac tone of

musing ends up in a rather ironic conclusion, which is a gesture that casts the preceding lyrical digression (stanzas 33–34) into an ironic light. The ironic culmination is further strengthened by the manner of returning to the story:

> Nos hát, Balázs magát otthon epesztvén,
> Nagy gondolatjai egymást szövik;
> Eszébe jut, hogy lőn nagygyá Demoszthén
> Mikor lenyirta a haját tövig;
> Igy képzeletjét mind tovább eresztvén,
> Harag s tervezgetés közt küzködik,
> Mig végre a szobát megunva bent,
> Szellőzni a muzeum-kertbe ment.
>
> *So then, Balázs languishes at home,*
> *Developing his magnificent ideas;*
> *He recalls how Demosthenes became great*
> *When he shaved off his hair;*
> *Letting his imagination go further and further,*
> *He is torn between wrath and planning,*
> *Until at last, getting bored of staying inside,*
> *He went to breathe fresh air in the museum's garden.*
>
> (László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto I, stanza 36)

In terms of diegesis, solitude can thus only be interpreted as a background element; that is, as a condition that facilitates and/or triggers Balázs's entering a new phase in life, as is clear from subsequent parts of the story. The narrator's digression – and the resulting invocation of a reflexive attitude towards the text – is hence fully arbitrary and depends entirely on when the narrator wishes to use such an opportunity.

Similar examples can naturally be detected in large numbers (see also the previous sections of the present chapter). However, there are certain points of the text that seem to be especially suitable for hosting reflections: these are precisely the points where a caesura is created in the text in terms of editing; that is, the beginning and the ending of the individual cantos, and the beginning and the ending of the entire text.

2.8.1 Canto-initial and canto-final points

When discussing reflections on the process of writing and the product of writing (as manifest in the artefact of a book), it has already been pointed out that the way a text is divided into cantos is very often the result of arbitrary decisions on the narrator's part. Hence, there is no boundary in the story (e.g., the end of a life phase, or at least of a scene) matching the actual division of the text. Moreover, as division is typically paired up with a sharp caesura, the gesture of division implies that the narrator temporarily suspends narrating the story, as a result of which the reading process is also interrupted. As will be shown in Chapter 3, this convention goes back to Byron: however, even in the case of *Don Juan*, it cannot be fully explained by the fact that the text was issued in sequels, as a caesura can be observed even in places where there was none in the actual publication. Most verse novels, including László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages] or János Vajda's *Találkozások* [Encounters], were not published in sequels at all, while the gesture discussed above can still be observed.

In terms of opening and closing gestures, the individual cantos may explicitly be paired up in the sense that a closing gesture may be mirrored by a reopening gesture. In section 5 of this chapter it was pointed out that Canto I of *A délibábok hőse* ends in an arbitrary and emphatic gesture, even though its sharpness is not as vivid as the ending of Canto I of Pál Gyulai's *Romhányi* [Romhányi]. This ending has its opening pair in the beginning of Canto II:

Hányszor megállunk a Heraklesz-úton:
Küzdésre késztet dicsvágy s büszke ész,
De a szív csendes nyugalom után von,
Pázsitra, gyepre a szem vágyva néz;
Lelkünk röpülne, túl minden határon,
De bágyad a test, és ólom-nehéz.
Fölvillanó vágy, hamvadó remény!
Küzdelmöket de sokszor érzem én.

De a dologra hát! Mesénk megoldzott,
Szedjük guzsalyra s fejtsük a fonált.
Balázs szivébe új érzés lopódzott,
Melynek nevet biz' ő még nem talált;
Képzelme folyvást szerteszét kalózolt,
Ábrándja, mint hegyormi köd, zilált;
Lelkében hol magas dicsvágy zajong,
Hol csendes élvek édes vágya zsong.

How many times we stop on the Herculean way:
The desire for glory and the proud soul prompts us to struggle,
But the heart pulls in the direction of quiet tranquillity,
The eyes longingly look upon lawn and grass;
Our soul would fly, past all borders,
Yet the body is languid and heavy as lead.
Flashing desire, smouldering hope!
How often I feel them striving.

But let's get back to the task! Our tale has gone loose,
Let us put the thread on the distaff and spin it.
A new emotion crept into Balázs's heart,
And, indeed, he did not yet find a name for it;
His imagination was constantly wandering everywhere,
His dreams distempered, as the fog on a summit;
In his soul, sometimes there is the clamour of the desire for glory,
And at other times the buzz of the desire for quiet and sweet pleasures.

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto II, stanzas 1–2)

The first stanza of the above quotation is a personal musing from the narrator's part, providing an instance of digression regarding the story. The second stanza continues narrating the story on the one hand, and explicitly refers to the interruption in narration on the other hand: interruption in this case is not so much the result of the digression instantiated by the first stanza as that of the caesura between Cantos I and II. As far as the story is concerned, the caesura is not fully justifiable, since the topic is still Balázs's emotional life, and there is no significant elapse of time, nor is diegesis divided by it; in this sense, it becomes clear from the beginning of Canto II (at the latest) that division is a subjective decision taken by the narrator. In this way, dividing the text into cantos/chapters in verse novels is one typical way of creating a reflexive relationship to the text.

Division does not necessarily imply the pairing up of closing and opening reflections. Comparing the two, the closing of cantos is definitely sharper, since a reflected way of ending a canto results in an interruption with respect to continuous narration, in some cases even in an interruption conflicting the events of the story. The locus of *A délibábok hőse* discussed above shows an interruption which leaves the hero in a static emotional state. By contrast, as pointed out previously, at the end of Canto I of *Romhányi*, the life of the hero (Romhányi) is in danger:

Nyomába jőnek a zsandárok,
Nagy volt rá nézve a veszély,
De megsegíté a jó árok
És a korom-sötétü éj.
Futott, futott, bár nagyon fáradt
És beteges, kiéhezett…
De, olvasóm, ezer bocsánat!
Itt megszakítom könyvemet.
Mert kifáradtam én is immár,
Üld engem is sok durva zsandár:
Sokféle gondok és bajok,
Csak néha, lopva irhatok.

He was chased by the gendarmes,
He was in great peril,
But a good trench aided him,
As did the pitch-dark night.
He ran, he ran, though very tired
And weak, starved…
But, my reader, a thousand apologies!
I have to interrupt my book here.
For I have become weary myself, too,
I am also chased by many crude gendarmes:
Several problems and troubles,
I can only write occasionally and in secret.

(Pál Gyulai, *Romhányi*, Canto I, stanza 61)

The way the narrator closes the canto is highly ironic: the canto started with Romhányi fleeing, and the text of the canto is in this sense dedicated to the presentation of this fleeing character, as well as providing all the background information necessary to understand his present life situation. In this way, Romhányi's life story and his present state meet precisely in the stanza quoted above. Hence, the description of his flight could be continued, especially because its outcome is completely unforeseeable at this point. At any rate, the narrator returns to Romhányi's flight only in stanza 4 of the next canto: more precisely, the intention of doing so is explicitly stated in stanza 4, and the actual returning can be found in stanza 5.

A significant source of the narrator's irony is the fact that Romhányi's fleeing is compared to the narrator's own problems, whereby the parallelism is not entirely

clear. The gendarmes chasing the narrator are not necessarily real gendarmes, but it may well be that the expression is to be interpreted metaphorically; that is, as a synonym of "several problems and troubles". It is very improbable that the narrator is a soldier fleeing after the suppression of the war of independence. It is evident from other (especially the subsequent) parts of the text that the time of narration is well after the war of independence, and while the narrator was in fact a fleeing soldier once, he looks back on this period of his life from a considerable distance. On the other hand, although it is not clear why the narrator can only write "occasionally" and "in secret", that fact that was able to write a rather long canto without having been forced to suspend writing (which is what the narrator's self-presentation indicates) implies that his life is not in immediate danger. Romhányi's flight is in this sense reduced to a trivial matter by way of the narrator foregrounding his own problems, while the reader is offered no rationally satisfying answer for why the story was interrupted, as the narrator's gesture is rather arbitrary, and primarily indicates his dominance.

2.8.2 Text-initial and text-final points

The endings of the individual cantos are thus especially good points in the text for the story to be backgrounded by the narrator's personal preferences. The beginning and the ending of the entire text are, however, even more emphatic points. It is a convention in verse novels for the narrator to start the text with some personal reflection, while the story starts a bit later. Apart from a personal tone, a characteristic property of these parts of the text is that the narrator reflects on the text to be created, either on diverse features thereof (in terms of form and/or content), or on its purpose, and in some cases on the cause behind writing, or on the circumstances of writing.

A prototypical example is the opening of László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages], which starts with the narrator's personal reflections:

> Mult évek emlékén el-elborongok,
> Az ifjuság szép kertjét átfutám.
> Nem vágyom én – midőn még semmi gondot
> Nem ismerünk – a gyermekkor után,
> Midőn fülembe játék zajja zsongott
> S mi a remény, czél, küzdés, nem tudám:
> – A gyermek-emlék tán mosolyra kelt,
> De megnyugszunk benne: szép volt s letelt.

From time to time, I contemplate the memory of past years,
I run through the beautiful garden of youth.
I do not long for childhood,
When one knows no sorrows,
When the clamour of play buzzed in my ears
And I did not know what hope, goal, struggle meant:
– Childhood memories may make one smile,
But our heart is at rest: it was nice and it is past.

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto I, stanza 1)

The narrator continues this line of thought in the following stanza:

Más korszak az, mit lelkem néha fájlal,
Fölszítva hamvadó emlékeket:
Ama hivő kor, melyben (pelyhes állal)
Vártam dörögni a sötét eget;
Hivém, lelkemben egy szép ideállal,
Hogy majd elűzünk minden felleget,
És akkor börtön és trón szétomolván,
Az „egy akol s pásztor" támad ki romján.

It is a different time that my soul sometimes longs for,
Stirring up fading memories:
The era, when (with a fleecy beard)
I longed for the dark sky to start thundering;
With a fine ideal in my soul, I believed
That we would dispel all the clouds,
And then, prison and throne having collapsed,
"One flock, one shepherd" will arise from the ruins.

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto I, stanza 2)

While this is still part of the narrator's personal retrospection, the prospective story is closer in the sense that the narrator names and briefly describes the period to be thematised. Stanzas 3–7 elaborate on these dreams and relate how such idealism is confronted with historical experience, and why their opposition is necessary. Even

though this has so far been primarily based on the personal experience of the narrator, some more general statements clarify that the problem is not an idiosyncratic one. This is explicitly stated in stanza 8:

S ez álom nemcsak engem lelkesíte,
A nemzetnek volt az remény-kora:
Mint Júda népe, oly hittel tekinte
Bizton közel várt megváltóira,
Mindenkit egy vágy, egy érzés hevíte,
S elönté annak boldog mámora,
Nehéz igánkat is paczkázva vittük,
S mert láttuk a czélt, már elérni hittük.

And I was not the only one inspired by this dream,
It was the period of hope for the nation:
They waited for their redeemers (expected to arrive soon with certainty)
With such faith as the people of Juda
Everyone was heated by a single desire, a single emotion,
And was overcome by its blissful ecstasy,
We were cheeky even when carrying our heavy yoke,
And we thought we were about to reach our goal, merely because we saw it.

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto I, stanza 8)

According to this, the problem in question (chasing ideals) is a general one, namely that of the nation, or a given period of that nation. Moreover, as specified by the next stanza, the problem stems from the fundamental characteristic of the (Hungarian) nation:

Elérni rögtön; mert folyvást, kitartón[16]
Haladni czélra nem természetünk,
Számítni sem, se időben se térben,
Hanem: „Hipp-hopp! mint gondolat, gyerünk!"
Serény kitartás nincs a szittya vérben,
Lassú, kimért munkát nem tűrhetünk;

[16] The last word of the line (*kitartón* 'persistently') appears in later editions of the text as *kimérten* 'properly, painstakingly', which rhymes with the ending of the third line (the rhyme structure of the whole text is regular).

Ezerszer elmondott tapasztalás
S példája hősöm: Hűbelé Balázs.

To reach it at once; because to proceed towards a goal
Steadily and persistently is against our nature,
Nor is to calculate, neither in time, nor in space,
But rather: "In a jiffy! as fast as thought, let's go!"
There is no diligent persistence in the Scythian blood,
We cannot endure slow, paced work;
This observation has been pointed out thousands of time
And is exemplified by my hero: Balázs Hűbele.

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto I, stanza 9)

The problem is precisely described in this stanza: apart from chasing ideals, the lack of perseverance belongs here, and the sum of the two gives a quality that is seen as a quasi-inherent property of the group in question (the nation): in this sense, it is true both of the narrator and of Balázs.

Hence, the narrator essentially claims that the work is the confirmation of the thesis discussed above through the example of Balázs (see also the analyses by Szajbély 2002 and Z. Kovács 2008 in this respect). The example-status of the hero highlights an important property of the relationship between narrator and hero. As is clear from the sequence of arguments in the preceding stanzas, both the narrator and Balázs are members of the same nation; thus, the thesis applies to both: in this sense, the narrator acknowledges some sort of fellowship with Balázs. At the same time, by assigning Balázs the status of an example, the narrator also alienates himself from his hero, and their relationship becomes hierarchical, since the narrator has access to Balázs's entire life. Moreover, hierarchy also implies that the two individuals (Balázs and the narrator), while both belonging to the generic group, are not exchangeable. Still, it is rather questionable whether the work confirms the thesis, as Balázs's fate contradicts it: the failures of Balázs are not due to his own character but result from external sources.

It is important to point out that the purpose of the work is thematised at the very beginning of the text; hence, the reflexive relation to both levels is established already then. Similar gestures can be detected in other verse novels as well, indicating that the beginning of the text is indeed a special point in terms of narrative structure. This point is virtually mirrored by reflections at the end of the texts, which may refer to the entire text and to the text-initial reflections. In this way, it is possible that reflections at the end of the text not only evaluate the whole work, but

they also elaborate on whether the aims stated at the beginning have been achieved. The end of *A délibábok hőse* shows an excellent example for this: in the final canto, Balázs is drunk and at one point tries to rape his former love, Etelke (who is now married to someone else); when he is sober again, he is ashamed of himself for having desecrated his purest sentiment. At this point, the narrator says the following:

Nem volna-é jobb, hogyha menedékül
Agyába egy golyót röpitene?
Igy háborog vad elmével. De végül
Lecsillapúl hánykodó szégyene,
Önvád lezsibbad, gyötrelem kibékül,
Engesztelődik házi istene:
Mint vágyat egykor, most meg bút feled,
S marad szivében száraz bölcselet.

Wouldn't it be better if he, as a recourse,
Sent a bullet into his brain?
So he churns with a frenzied mind. But at last
His restless shame subsides,
His self-reproach becomes numb, his torment is pacified,
His household deity is softened:
As he forgot desire once, he now forgets sorrow,
And dry wisdom remains in his heart.

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto IV, stanza 81)

The importance of the change described in the stanza above primarily lies in the fact that Balázs, after the period of chasing ideals, (apparently) reaches a disillusioned state, which is described by the narrator as some sort of an ideal state:

Azóta: nézi a világ folyását. –
Boldog, ki nem futott ábránd után!
Irigyli is tán egy-egy régi társát,
Ki általuszva négy-öt év jogán,
A járt nyomon kereste hivatását,
S ballag fölebb a hívatal fokán;
Nincs gondja több, mihelyt kékes papirja
Nehány két-rétre gyürt ivét beirja.

Since then: he watches the course of the world. –
Happy is whoever did not chase dreams!
He probably even envies some of his old pals,
Who, having completed the four or five years of law school,
Searched for their function along the beaten track,
And proceed further upwards in the hierarchy of bureaucracy;
All their problems vanish, as soon as they fill in
Some blue sheets of paper, folded into two.

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse*, Canto IV, stanza 82)

This argumentation matches the situation described at the beginning of the text, where the narrator is quite like Balázs in that both used to chase ideals. Yet the narrator is in a dominant position: the necessity of losing illusions is evident for him, while the story of Balázs is supposed to show the prior stage (chasing ideals and its ending in resignation. At the above point, Balázs is supposed to have reached resignation; in this sense, the loss of illusions is a finite process for both the narrator and Balázs.

The narrator now essentially issues maxims, which together constitute a lifestyle that excludes the chasing of ideals, and which is built upon the assumption that happiness can be achieved if one does not try to materialize unrealistic dreams. This line of thought, however, is interrupted and overwritten when the narrator says the following:

– És mégis boldog, százszor boldog az,
Kit csüggedetlen képzelem ragad;
Bár fürtje ősz is, szíve friss tavasz,
Melyben örökké új virág fakad;
Sebére ír, bajára van vigasz,
Bizalma szívós, nyúlik s nem szakad, –
Ki bizva vár: ha majd ez lesz, vagy az lesz,
Nép, hon, világ, mily boldog, bölcs, igaz lesz.

– And yet, happy is he, a hundred times more happy,
Who is lifted by imagination when he is distressed;
Even though his locks are white, his heart is fresh spring,
In which there are always new flowers growing;
There is balm for his wounds, there is consolation for his sorrows,
His confidence is indefatigable, it is flexible and does not tear, –

Who waits with faith: if this happens, or that happens,
How happy, wise, and righteous the people, the motherland, the world will be.

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse,* Canto IV, stanza 88)

According to this statement, self-delusion is not a necessarily finite process; hence, the macro-narrative that seemed to be true both for the narrator and for Balázs is far from being general, which in turn makes the conclusion of the text questionable: the previously issued maxims are annihilated by the more personal (and therefore more authentic) confession of the narrator. In the next stanza, the narrator explicitly states that self-delusion is immensely pleasant, though not useful. This line of thought ends in an unquestionably personal self-confession:

Hisz én is, ennyi tarka-barka rimmel
Mért bíbelődtem, s pöngetém dalom'?
Miért merengtem egy mesén örömmel?
Nem-é: mert azzal en-magam' csalom.
Beczéztem egy ifjonti érzelemmel,
Miből ma nincs, csak egy kis fájdalom;
És jól esett e dőre öncsalás. …
– Isten veled, szegény bohó Balázs.

And even myself, why have I fiddled around
With so many colourful rhymes, why have I sung my song?
Why have I mused about a tale with pleasure?
Isn't it because: I deceive myself this way.
I have fondled something with a youthful passion,
Something of which there is nothing left now, only a little sorrow;
And I have enjoyed futile self-deception…
– Farewell, poor, foolish Balázs!

(László Arany, *A délibábok hőse,* Canto IV, stanza 90)

The narrator's gesture affects not only the parable (or the absence thereof) on the diegetic level, but also the essence of narration, which is not (or not entirely) the narrative of self-deception but self-deception in itself. Viewed in this light, the text is not a quasi-objective document presenting the process of self-deception (and thereby a specific national property) but rather the imprint of the narrator's personal way of self-deception: the finite version of self-deception is, therefore, only a

single possibility out of several other versions of self-deception. The aim declared at the beginning of the text is overwritten, and the reader is forced to radically revaluate the whole of the preceding text, including the reading act. Strictly speaking, the reading act also qualifies as self-deception, inasmuch as there is a difference between the text that the reader was reading and the one that the reader thought to have read. At the same time, the text-final gesture naturally follows from the narrative structure of the whole work, which inherently involves continuously reflecting on the text; the ending of *A délibábok hőse* shows that the narrative presented in the text and the narrative about the text can inseparably be intertwined with each other. All this also demonstrates that reflections in verse novels cannot be regarded as imperfections of the text: they are inherent, fundamental features of the genre.

In connection with reflections at the end of the texts, I would very briefly like to touch upon the issue of unfinishedness. In certain cases, the author originally planned to continue the work, which, however, did not happen: this is true of Pál Gyulai's *Romhányi* [Romhányi], which is generally accounted for by the changes in Gyulai's life (see Imre 1990: 69).

In other cases, unfinishedness rather refers to a certain incompletion of the composition, in the sense that the story could be continued but the narrator arbitrarily decides not to do so, quite similarly to what can be observed at the end of individual cantos. A typical example for this is the ending of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, where the narrator leaves the hero in the midst of a rather embarrassing scene; yet the composition is completed, since the narrator takes leave both of his hero and of the work (cf. Bojtár 2000: 83–85). This can be observed in *A délibábok hőse* as well, given that the loss of illusions on Balázs's part is not necessarily finite: the narrator has overwritten the exclusiveness of this possibility by associating self-deception with happiness, and by using himself as an example for showing that the finiteness of self-deception is merely apparent.

The abrupt interruption of the story is even more emphatic at the end of János Vajda's *Találkozások* [Encounters], as the future of the hero is doubtful in every sense:

Szegény, szegény fiú, megvallom,
Bár nem kicsinylem vétkedet,
Én büntetésedet sokallom
S a gyógyulástól féltelek.
Lelkem kinozzák bősz sejtelmek,
Hogy mért nem haltál, mért éltél meg?
Mi lesz a vég, mi vár reád,
Nincs hátra még tragédiád?

Poor, poor boy, I must confess,
Although I do not consider your sin a minor one,
I deem your punishment too severe,
And I fear for your recovery.
My soul is tormented by grim suspicions:
Why didn't you die, why did you stay alive?
What will be the end, what is there waiting for you,
Isn't your tragedy yet to come?

(János Vajda, *Találkozások*, A Dunán [On the Danube], stanza 82)

However, the narrator explicitly states in the last stanza that he does not wish to continue the story or to answer the questions that may even be more interesting than the ones he has addressed in previous parts of the text:

De mindegy... legalább nekem már!
Élsz, halsz, beteg vagy óriás,
Hajh, az idő fölöttem eljár;
Jövőd, ha lesz, megirja más.
A föld szinén, vagy bár alatta:
Szivemben el vagy már siratva.
Élő, halott, vagy – rettegek! –
E kettő egyben – ég veled!

But it's all the same... at least for me now!
Whether you live, die, are ill or colossal,
Alas! time is passing me by;
If you have a future, someone else will narrate it.
Whether on earth's surface or beyond it:
In my heart, I have already mourned you.
Alive, dead, or – as I dread –
The two together – farewell!

(János Vajda, *Találkozások*, A Dunán [On the Danube], stanza 83)

The story remains open; moreover, the fate of the hero, Ernő is extremely doubtful, since it is not even clear whether he is to stay alive or not, and what the narrator means by Ernő being both alive and dead. At the same time, it is obvious that not continuing

the story is an arbitrary decision from the narrator's part: this gesture underlines the completeness of composition alongside the incompleteness of the story.

Unfinishedness in verse novels thus may refer to the incompleteness of diegesis and to examples where the composition makes the impression of having been abandoned by the author. It is important to stress that such narrative gestures and methods, contrary to Imre (1990), cannot be regarded as errors or blemishes, as they in fact follow from the peculiar narrative structure that characterises the entire text in the case of verse novels. On the one hand, similar gestures can be detected at other points of the text, too (especially at the end of the individual cantos); on the other hand, narrative structure is based on reflexivity, which by definition moves away from mere storytelling. Hence, narration is more centred around the narrator's persona (and arbitrariness) than around the actual story.

2.9 Central and marginal texts

In the light of the model based on reflections, as presented in earlier parts of this chapter, I will briefly touch upon the issue of central and marginal texts; that is, whether my narratology-based model can adequately address the kind of variation shown by the genre of the verse novel. The distinction between prototypical texts and ones that can be associated with the genre only conditionally must be accounted for, bearing in mind that this kind of variation is still to be represented along a continuum. Obviously, I do not venture to provide a full picture, as that would practically involve considering every single text; instead, I will show that the model proposed in my dissertation is flexible enough to handle the aforementioned variation, as opposed to analyses based on rigid generic categories.

The narrative structure of verse novels is fundamentally characterised by reflections which may affect both the diegetic and the extradiegetic levels. The proportion of these, either with respect to each other or to the entire length of the text, may vary. Yet, it is important that they are markedly present; that is, they indeed have to be fundamental narrative properties and not merely appear as by-products. This can be observed in central prototypical verse novels, such as László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages], János Arany's *Bolond Istók* [Stephen the Fool], and József Kiss's *Legendák a nagyapámról* [About my Grandfather].

Of course, there are works that unquestionably qualify as verse novels in the Byronic-Pushkinian sense (see Imre 1990: 5–6), yet they are less prototypical, even though they are definitely not marginal. Such an instance is Pál Gyulai's *Romhányi*

[Romhányi], which is characterised by a reflexive narrative structure, but the narrator loses reflexive distancing in the last canto, and the fundamental ironic tone is exchanged for an identificational tone, after which a return to the ironic mode is virtually impossible (see Bacskai-Atkari 2008a regarding the reasons for this). János Vajda's *Találkozások* [Encounters] likewise shows considerable deviations. The first two cantos contain a high number of reflections on both levels of the text as well as language games, while the same properties are essentially absent in the last two cantos, and the remaining few reflections are characterised by an identificational tone, lacking the playfulness associated with verse novels (see Bacskai-Atkari 2009).

Among the works Imre (1990: 6) identifies as texts that can conditionally be regarded as verse novels, two should be mentioned here: János Vajda's *Alfréd regénye* [Alfréd's Romance] and Endre Ady's *Margita élni akar* [Margita Wants to Live]. In both cases, the narrator is identical with the hero. In *Alfréd regénye*, there is in principle a frame story written by Alfréd's friend. This part of the text contains reflections on the text to come, yet the separation of the two narrators deprives the text of the playfulness that can be observed in prototypical verse novels, especially because it does not interrupt the narrated story but is rather separated from it. Moreover, this separation is especially sharp as the narrator of the frame story is mostly concerned with apologising to the reader, thereby alienating the actual story from himself. The embedded story is narrated by Alfréd: his reflections are, however, the manifestations of the same reminiscence that gives rise to the story; thus, there is no considerable reflexive distance to estrange the reader from the text. Reflections on the extradiegetic level are altogether absent: for Alfréd, the act of narration is not a problem to be discussed, and the literary and/or linguistic shape of the text is not a primary, thematised question. In addition, the plot is not rich in action, but it is rather subjective, and the story is dissolved in Alfréd's personal concerns.

A similar problem is raised by Ady's *Margita élni akar* as well, where the narrator is foregrounded to the extent that he supersedes the story: while the story can be reconstructed, it is clearly not the primary subject. The dominance of the narrator's self results in reflections being only marginally present in the text: these are ones on the extradiegetic level, positioning the text within the genre of the verse novel and establishing contact with the readers (see Bacskai-Atkari 2011a for more details). Nevertheless, these do not constitute a structure comparable to what can be observed in prototypical verse novels, and the absence of an actual story likewise entails the elimination of an important element of a narrative text.

Both marginal verse novels mentioned above are definitely related to the verse novel due to certain properties, and they allude to the genre in such a way that the question of relatedness arises naturally. However, their marginality stems precisely

from these properties not being fundamental compositional elements, that is, narrative structure is not built upon them, unlike in verse novels. A structure built on reflections is of course not to be interpreted along the lines of binary categories: rather, the differences shown by the appearance of certain elements and the interrelatedness thereof are gradual in nature.

Hence, the model proposed in this chapter is suitable for dealing with the problem that there are not only prototypical but also less typical verse novels, and even texts that can merely be associated with the genre. In this sense, the genre definition based on strictly formal, narrative poetic traits can avoid the problems that inevitably arise in a system based on rigid categories; the genre definition relies on inherent structural properties of the individual texts and not on external, predefined criteria.



Byron and the English verse novel

The aim of the present chapter is to examine the issue of Byron's verse novel (or verse novels) and the (English) literary antecedents thereof. The verse novel as a genre clearly has its origins in Byron's oeuvre, which makes Byron especially important in terms of the Hungarian verse novel for two reasons. On the one hand, Byron is a crucial antecedent of the Hungarian verse novel; hence, a closer investigation of Byron's texts may reveal certain differences from Hungarian verse novels, thereby highlighting the specific properties of the Hungarian verse novel. On the other hand, Byron's works had antecedents as well, and any deviations can not only indicate the differentiation of the verse novel from other genres, but may also point out what kind of literary context was necessary and/or sufficient for the appearance and the eventual spread of the verse novel. Adopting the narratology-based model introduced in Chapter 2, I will concentrate on the questions I have examined in connection with the Hungarian verse novel. Since many of these issues have been dealt with in the literature to varying degrees, the first section of this chapter will review and evaluate some of the most important proposals.

3.1 Earlier accounts

In Hungarian literary tradition, it is often assumed that Byron's *Don Juan* was the first verse novel. This raises certain questions that are crucial for literary history, which would arise from a cross-cultural generic point of view even if *Don Juan* were not an important work. The concept of being the first instance of a genre can be interpreted primarily from two main perspectives, and the questions that arise can be ordered along these lines.

On the one hand, if *Don Juan* is treated as the first verse novel, this can be only interpreted against the background of an existing literary tradition: consequently, the antecedents of *Don Juan* must be identified in English literature, and it has to be examined how *Don Juan* (and the verse novel as such) differs from these. In other words, it should be clarified why, and from which point it is justifiable to talk about a new genre.

Since the verse novel is essentially a hybrid genre, a broad spectrum of antecedents is to be expected. Yet these can be grouped into two major directions: various verse narratives (the most important one being the mock epic) and prose novels. Both have considerable traditions in English literature, showing narratological properties that can be detected in verse novels, including *Don Juan*: for instance, the twisting of epic conventions comes from the mock epic.

Apart from the existing well-established literary tradition, more direct antecedents must also be considered; that is, the works of Byron's contemporaries. The question is namely whether *Don Juan* can be regarded as the first verse novel because it was fundamentally different from the verse narratives written by his contemporaries, or whether it has a specific status rather because it arrived at different conclusions while addressing chiefly similar questions. In this respect, the issue of how *Don Juan* relates to Byron's other verse narratives must also be addressed. For instance, the spleen characteristic of the hero can be observed in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and the satirical tone is shared by *Beppo*; yet neither *Childe Harold* nor *Beppo* is regarded as a verse novel, at least not in the sense that the genre based on *Don Juan* and *Eugene Onegin* is to be understood.

On the other hand, the primacy of *Don Juan* implies that there is some continuation: the question is which national literatures show this. In English literature namely, the verse novel as a genre is virtually absent (excluding now the revival of the verse narrative at the end of the 20th century). In other literary contexts, works that can be regarded as verse novels appeared, clearly influenced by Byron; yet the genre is practically restricted to a single author in each case: this can be observed in Russian literature. In Polish literature, several verse novels can be identified, just like in Hungarian literature, where the verse novel was clearly established as a genre. Hence, the question is what conditions were necessary in Hungarian literature so that the verse novel could arise, and what conditions were hence absent from English literature.

A further consequence of the problems raised above can be summarised, somewhat simplistically, as follows. From a cross-cultural point of view, *Don Juan* is a verse novel (and the first one); if so, strictly within the context of English literature, *Don Juan* qualifies not only as the first but also as the last verse novel. This is, however, rather paradox from a theoretical perspective, and indicates that while *Don Juan* can be treated as a verse novel cross-literally, it should be associated with some other genre within English literature from which it was differentiated in such a way that a markedly new type of text can be identified. If such a genre exists, not only examine the differentiation from contemporary works should be examined but also how the genre comprising *Don Juan* survived after *Don Juan*, if at all – if not, the question why it was precisely *Don Juan* that brought an end to a certain literary tradition must be addressed.

Finally, it is worth highlighting that while the questions raised above apply generally to the history of the genre, it is of primary importance in each case to examine the specifically narratological aspects of the individual issues. Ultimately, the question is how different the narrative structure of *Don Juan* is from the texts that can be regarded as antecedents (that is, antecedents also in terms of narrative structure),

and whether there are certain narratological properties that may have hindered the continuation of the verse novel in English literature.

An emphasis on the narratological viewpoint is necessary not only because the verse novel can primarily be defined along narratological terms, but also because this approach would allow to account for why there was no continuation of the text type established by *Don Juan* in English literature. Moreover, this account would be based on the structure that characterises the text of verse novels. While it is certainly true that Byron became a quasi-diabolic figure for the English public and the reception of *Don Juan* in England was not too positive either, these points would be unsatisfactory as explanations, especially if the genre or text type that served as an antecedent of *Don Juan* also ended in *Don Juan*. In other words, if *Don Juan* were merely a blind spot in English literature, one would expect the preceding processes to have continued essentially undisturbed.

3.1.1 The romantic verse narrative – Fischer (1991)

First, I would like to review the analysis by Fischer (1991), which is especially important because it places *Don Juan* in the context of the English romantic verse narrative, thereby essentially making the status of *Don Juan* (and the verse novel) understandable in the history of English literature. As Fischer (1991: 2–3) notes in his introduction, the romantic verse narrative is, strictly speaking, not a real genre, and should not be taken as a specific form: rather, it is the manifestation of a tendency characteristic of a certain period, namely between 1798 and 1830. The English verse narratives of this time range are poetically multifarious and can be classified into various genres; still, they can be interpreted along the lines of a single literary development.

Romantic verse narratives have three major literary antecedents: the epic, the romance, and the ballad (Fischer 1991: 12–13). Hence, in order to understand the romantic verse narrative as a literary phenomenon, it must examined how the representatives of Romanticism perceived these genres, and in what ways they were innovative with respect to the conventions of these genres (Fischer 1991: 13).

Regarding the epic, Fischer (1991) highlights the following defining generic properties. First, verse form is an inherent property of the epic: that is, while it was originally a trait required by diction, it remained an obligatory feature even when oral performance was no longer associated with the genre (Fischer 1991: 15–16, 24). Furthermore, the epic is characterised by a heroic theme, the presence of mythological and supernatural elements, as well as an epic hero who has matching qualities (Fischer 1991: 16–24). In connection with the theme, it should be kept in mind that the elevated

topic of the epic requires a corresponding elevated tone and way of narration: by contrast, mock epics primarily feature ridiculous topics and parody the (classical) epic chiefly by targeting their formal properties (Fischer 1991: 18–19). Finally, as Fischer (1991: 24) points out, the initial situation concerning the epic is that the poet narrates the story to a like-minded audience (either hearers or readers). According to Fischer (1991: 20), the period of English Romanticism saw remarkable experiments to create a modern epic: this goal was not fully achieved, and even *Don Juan*, the closest approximate to the epic, is far more subjective than to qualify as a proper epic.

Verse form is crucial in the case of the romance as well, especially since the romance in a way grew out of the epic; however, the notion of the romance can be applied to prose texts, too (Fischer 1991: 25). The differentiation from the epic is manifest primarily in that the romance has a more modest scale, it covers a smaller set of problems, and it is characterised by a less elevated tone (Fischer 1991: 27, 31). The audience addressed by the poet typically (but not necessarily) belongs to a certain social class and/or nationality (Fischer 1991: 30–31). Regarding its form, the romance demonstrates more freedom than the epic, and the poet's aim is usually entertainment and the triggering of excitement (Fischer 1991: 30).

As opposed to the epic and the romance, the ballad remains very close to its folklore origins even in its high artistic version; moreover, regarding its form, it is short, concise, it is typically divided into stanzas, and partially because of all these, it bears many similarities to lyric poetry and to drama (Fischer 1991: 32–34). The initial situation is that the poet presents the text to certain (undefined) members of the community, with the primarily goal of entertainment, and the poet belongs to the community; he is not socially distinct (Fischer 1991: 34–35). Regarding the topic, the ballad depicts some unusual event in a not elevated tone (Fischer 1991: 35).

The considerably increased role of narrative poetry in English Romanticism can in part be attributed to the fact that an emotional approach to poetry gained more and more ground in literary criticism in the works of scholars such as William Duff and Adam Ferguson (Fischer 1991: 37). The hypothesis is that poetic imagination was originally manifest in a more spontaneous, more individual and clearer way than in later periods in which culture was rather built upon a rational basis (Fischer 1991: 37). In this context, there was an increased interest towards medieval culture, which in turn resulted in the revival of popular medieval genres (Fischer 1991: 38–39). While this may suggest the primacy of the ballad, it must be stressed that the ballad could only serve as a model for the romantic verse narrative, not in the least because the ballad, in comparison to the epic, has certain limitations making a direct continuation impossible (Fischer 1991: 39).

As far as the attitude towards the epic is concerned, an interesting duality can be observed in 18th-century literature (and partially in 19th-century literature, too).

The epic was a venerated genre, and practically all the significant poets, including Pope, Wordsworth and Byron, planned to write an epic in their earlier years; yet none of them factually accomplished this goal (Fischer 1991: 40). At the same time, poets of lesser importance, such as Aaron Hill, Richard Glover and William Sotheby, wrote epics conforming to the classical rules (Fischer 1991: 40). As Fischer (1991: 40) points out, this is not merely a retrospective interpretation of present-day literary criticism, but it also reflects contemporary views: see, for instance, Sir Walter Scott's opinion on Southey's epic (*The Curse of Kehama*).

It is overall true for English Romanticism that the concept of the original, authentic epic was revalued in contrast with the literary epic; hence, the romantic approach to the genre came to be stronger than the goal of strictly adhering to the rules of the literary epic (Fischer 1991: 41). This essentially resulted in two literary attitudes: a moderate course and a radical course (Fischer 1991: 41–42). The advocates of the moderate course proposed that while the basic character of the epic should be maintained, the strict generic rules should be abandoned; the proponents of the radical course believed that the epic could be maintained only by adhering to these rules; hence, radically different and new works (or genres) should be created (Fischer 1991: 41–42).

Apart from the reassessment of the classical epic, the ballad also played an important role in the spread of the romantic verse narrative, since this created some continuity with the verse narratives of the preceding periods; moreover, as has already been pointed out, it was essentially perceived as an authentic genre (Fischer 1991: 53–54). In addition, the novel provided continuity as well, but the prestige of the prose novel in the period under scrutiny had not yet reached that of epic poetry; viewed in this light, it is not surprising either that verse narratives sought to satisfy certain aspirations of the novel (cf. Fischer 1991: 53–54).

The first truly enigmatic representative of the romantic verse narrative was Walter Scott, with *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*; yet the romantic verse narrative had existed before Scott as well, and it naturally influenced Scott directly or indirectly (Fischer 1991: 57). A well-known example is Walter Savage Landor's *Gebir* (1798), which is a classical epic that in many respects follows Milton, even though it did not (and does not) count as an easily understandable text, especially due to its narrative structure characterised by interruptions and omissions (see Fischer 1991: 57–60).

Naturally, the role of the *Lyrical Ballads* (by Wordsworth and Coleridge) cannot be neglected either, although its influence can primarily be identified as one on English Romantic poetry in general, rather than as a specific, direct source (Fischer 1991: 61–62). Features that should be mentioned are the colloquial tone of Wordsworth's poems, the experimentation with old or new forms, and the desire to organise rather different ideas into a narrative (Fischer 1991: 62). However, the *Lyrical Ballads*

did not initially appear to be a success, which is one reason why the work had effectively no impact, even though it was innovative in terms of the ballad. As a consequence, it was the kind of ballad written by Scott that later came to be truly successful, in which the medieval topic remained a dominant feature, as opposed to the concept of the *Lyrical Ballads* (Fischer 1991: 62–63).

On the other hand, as far as literary ambitions are concerned, Wordsworth also planned to write “the great contemporary epic poem”, which he mainly imagined to achieve through the genre of the romance; this desire can be detected in works such as *The Prelude*, *The Excursion*, and *The Recluse* (Fischer 1991: 63–65). Naturally, Wordsworth wrote further verse narratives as well, but these were far more lyrical and philosophical in their orientation than was generally true for the romantic verse narrative in the sense of Fischer (1991); hence, it is not in the least surprising that Wordsworth was not particularly influential in terms of the genre (see Fischer 1991: 63–68). The case of Coleridge can be characterised rather by the lack of ambition. His narrative poems either followed conventions more strictly (for instance, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* as a ballad), or they were left as fragments (such as *Christabel*), not to mention the fact that these works of Coleridge were not known by a wider audience in that period (see Fischer 1991: 67–69).

On the other hand, Southey, who according to contemporaries in many respects ranked with Scott, can be regarded as a significant antecedent: he relied on previous works, such as Landor’s *Gebir*, and his verse narratives can be regarded as examples of the romantic verse narrative based on their external features (Fischer 1991: 70–72). Southey experimented with new methods and the disruption of classical forms, as opposed to the conventional rules of the epic. Yet, his move towards the romance did not lessen his ambition of writing an epic, which can be detected in several of his texts – such as *Joan of Arc* (1796), *Thalaba* (1801) and *Madoc* (1805) –, even though the texts ultimately do not actually qualify as epics, notwithstanding the relevant ambitions and similarities (Fischer 1991: 70–76). Overall, Fischer (1991: 78) regards Southey to be a representative of the fluctuation between the early romantic verse narrative, the epic, and the romance. Note that this intermediate status was perceived by contemporary critics, too (see Fischer 1991: 78). The opinions on Southey were of course diverse: for instance, Byron regarded (and reviewed) Southey’s narrative poems as epics, and he judged them full of bile, except for *Roderick*, which he termed the greatest epic of the epoch (Fischer 1991: 85).

According to Fischer (1991: 87), the one who effectively revived and renewed the romance was Sir Walter Scott, chiefly because he regarded storytelling as the primary function of the romance, unlike the higher literary aims of Southey and the Lake Poets. On the other hand, as Fischer (1991: 87–88) highlights, Scott had excellent business skills as well, by which he not only identified the right genre for his audience but also

knew when to step forward with that genre. In his introduction to the 1830 (collected) edition of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, Scott primarily claims that he wished to create a partly new genre that would differ from the rather tedious array of the many ballads that appeared in the period between 1804 and 1805 (Fischer 1991: 87–88).

In the case of Scott, the similarity to the works of minstrels of the Late Middle Ages can primarily be observed in terms of narrative structure, and as such, this kind of narrative structure works against a potential move towards the epic. Of course, by reaching back to the medieval ballad, Scott intended to neglect the poetic developments of subsequent periods in no way (cf. Fischer 1991: 89). Furthermore, Scott was experimenting with new verse forms. He rejected both the stanzas characteristic of ballads and the kind of versification primarily associated with epics, partly because both had become tedious for the readership, partly because he wished to choose a form for the story that would render narration (and reading) smooth (Fischer 1991: 89–90). As opposed to the uniform and/or highly conventional features of the epic and the romance, Scott liberated the narrative and made it centred on the story (Fischer 1991: 91). It is an interesting fact in this respect that contemporary critics typically identified precisely those points as errors that either did not bring the plot forward or were examples of digression (Fischer 1991: 91).

Regarding such episodes or digressions, they never actually appear as elements seriously affecting the narration of the main line of the story: they are not long, and they never create a critical distance from the narrated story (Fischer 1991: 91–92). From the reader's point of view, this also means that Scott's texts are designed for fast reading, and it is not surprising that Scott later turned to the prose novel (Fischer 1991: 92).

It is worth considering how Scott defined his own works: he termed his verse narratives "metrical romances". This is important among other reasons because he identified a genre considerably looser than the epic; hence, contemporary critics could not accuse him for not adhering to the rules of the epic (as they did in the case of Southey) since Scott's text was decidedly not an epic (see Fischer 1991: 93–95).

As Fischer (1991: 93–94) shows, Scott preserved his leading position in epic poetry until the appearance of Byron, and he essentially met the demand of the reading public by providing a constant, sometimes even mechanical, repetition of texts in a popular genre. This quality was also pointed out by the concerns raised by some contemporary critics, such as Jeffrey and Hazlitt (Fischer 1991: 104–106). On the other hand, there was a different demand as well: that of constant innovation, for which Scott proved to be inadequate, as opposed to Byron: among other reasons, this led Scott to turn to the novel (Fischer 1991: 94). In his theoretical writings, Scott justifies the move towards the novel by claiming that in the modern age, the novel has taken up the role previously held by the (medieval) romance (Fischer 1991: 106–107). Note that Scott had previously identified the move towards the romance (and the ballad)

in relation to the epic, partially by referring to poets such as Spenser, Milton and Dryden, who did not despise similar genres; the legitimation of the romance thus lies precisely in its difference from the epic (Fischer 1991: 96, 108–109).

The importance of Scott can also be measured in the extent of his followers: his contemporaries perceived his verse narratives as examples of a radically new genre, which immediately had its followers, either on the level of mere imitation, or in ways that contributed to individual developments in the genre (Fischer 1991: 110). The latter type comprises Wordsworth's *The White Doe of Rylstone*, which was, however, outdated at the time of its publication in the sense that Scott's most important romances and Byron's first narratives were already well-known (Fischer 1991: 112–119). The romantic verse narrative was already more developed than what Wordsworth's work could offer, even though Wordsworth was the only one who wanted to turn the genre to a philosophical direction (Fischer 1991: 112–119).

A different course was taken by Thomas Campbell, primarily as the author of *Gertrude of Wyoming*: he was closer to 18th-century traditions, and he applied the Spenserian stanza in his verse narratives (see Fischer 1991: 120–122). The latter method actually contributed to a "bad" narrative technique: instead of a smooth flow of the narrative, the text tends to be divided into sequences of distinct pictures along the lines of the stanzas, a property which disturbed contemporary readers whereas it rather has an impressionistic effect on the modern reader (Fischer 1991: 123). Interestingly, Byron was quite ambivalent regarding Campbell's work (see Fischer 1991: 123). For Campbell, one of the most important concerns was to harmonise the traditions of classicism with the contemporary Romanticism; the same aim can be detected in the verse narratives of Samuel Rogers, William Lisle Bowles, and James Montgomery (see Fischer 1991: 120–136).

Finally yet importantly, George Crabbe should be mentioned: his poetry is characterised mostly by a reflexive and objective tone (Fischer 1991: 138–139), which is often reduced to recording consecutive events. The narrator cannot be distinguished as a salient figure, not even to the extent that his personal stance towards the story or the characters would surface (Fischer 1991: 144).

The romantic verse narrative thus shows great diversity; yet the only real culmination is Scott. However, the popularity of his version of the romantic verse narrative started to decline considerably around 1805 (Fischer 1991: 146). The renewal was brought about by Byron, along with the ultimate demise of the genre; to a lesser extent, Shelley and Keats contributed to the same process (Fischer 1991: 146–147). Byron's significance can primarily be observed in the increased presence of subjectivity, which shifts the focus from the hero to the narrator (Fischer 1991: 147).

Byron's role regarding the romantic verse narrative is manifest in three main aspects. First, he "developed to their full extent the possibilities of the popular genre

of romantic verse narrative as initiated by Scott" (Fischer 1991: 148). Second, he "carried the genre further, as a narrator who explored new forms, styles and effects and thus contributed to the dissolution of the initial type" (Fischer 1991: 148). Third, he was "a critic of the genre, and indeed of romantic poetry as a whole, who realized (…) that the possibilities of the romantic verse narrative as a genre were limited" (Fischer 1991: 148).

The popularity of Byron's verse narratives stemmed primarily from the fact that they satisfied the demands of contemporary readers: the stories and the characters were diversified and interesting, the way of presentation was exciting, and versification was jaunty and playful, yet classical (Fischer 1991: 148–149). Contemporaries unquestionably saw a follower of Scott in him, even though a certain degree of difference can be observed in the early works as well, such as the lack of a plot in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* or *Lara* (Fischer 1991: 149). The originality of Byron was chiefly associated with subjectivity: essentially all the Byronic heroes can be interpreted as Byron's alter egos, all of them sufferinf from the hopelessness of existence (Fischer 1991: 150).

Of course, *Childe Harold* is problematic from the perspective of the romantic verse novel, inasmuch as it essentially lacks a story; yet Byron's way of transforming his personal experiences into a literary form can best be observed here (Fischer 1991: 150–151). Contemporary readers identified Childe Harold with Byron; regarding such identification, Byron was ambiguous himself, in that he partly protested it, while he actively fostered it at the same time (Fischer 1991: 151). What the popularity of *Childe Harold* meant for the romantic verse narrative was that the Scott romance type was superseded by the Byronic verse narrative, the most important property of which was subjectivity, seen by contemporaries as a modern gesture (Fischer 1991: 152–153). Nevertheless, the lack of a story in *Childe Harold* aroused criticism, too, which is one of the reasons why Byron's subsequent verse narratives, such as *The Giaour* and *Lara*, were shorter and more concise (Fischer 1991: 153–154).

However, subjectivity in Byron's verse narratives was generally present at the expense of storytelling, and as the contemporary critic Jeffrey observed, this property was irreconcilable with Scott's type of verse narratives (Fischer 1991: 156). In this way, the Byronic verse narrative constitutes an endpoint of the romantic verse narrative, since it eliminates the primacy of the story, thereby assigning the task of storytelling to other epic genres, while subjectivity leads back to lyric poetry (Fischer 1991: 156).

Byron's contribution to the romantic verse narrative is yet more complex due to *Don Juan*, in which he in some way returned to the epic, an important genre for his contemporaries (Fischer 1991: 156–157). At the same time, Byron became alienated from Romanticism, especially after having left England: apart from *Don Juan*, he wrote *Manfred* and *Beppo* in this period (Fischer 1991: 159–160). Furthermore, Cantos III and IV of *Childe Harold* already show a move away from the stereotypical Byronic

hero, in parallel with a turn towards the modern world and politics (Fischer 1991: 160). By this point, Byron had already developed an ironic attitude towards the kind of romantic verse narrative he had previously produced as well; this alienation can be observed in the relevant texts, including *Don Juan* (Fischer 1991: 161–162).

Overall, the analysis by Fischer (1991) is crucial for the understanding of the relation between Byron and contemporary romantic verse narratives; for instance, it is clear that *Don Juan* can be interpreted as an endpoint of the romantic verse narrative in English literature. At the same time, since Fischer (1991) does not approach the genre from a primarily narratological point of view, there are several questions regarding this relation that remain open in terms of narrative structure. It is not entirely clear in what ways the structural properties of the Byronic verse novel constituted an innovation compared to romantic verse narratives, and especially to the works of Scott. On the other hand, the question arises how the narrative structure of *Don Juan* relates to verse narratives prior to the romantic verse narrative. From an intercultural aspect, it should also be examined whether verse novels appearing in other national literatures had a similar set of preconditions as the one that can be observed in English literature.

3.1.2 Byron and Romanticism – McGann (2002)

In this section, I will review the approach of McGann (2002). The book is a compilation of McGann's previous essays on Byron in a more or less revised form. The individual contributions naturally take various viewpoints, but they share the focus on the relationship of Byron and Romanticism, either with respect to how Byron differs from his contemporaries in general, or how Byron's way of relating to literary tradition differs from that of others.

Milton is one of the most important authors regarding English epic poetry; as McGann (2002: 19) shows, Byron had reservations against him (for instance, in terms of rhythmic patterns), yet the influence of Milton on Byron is significant. This can be observed in two main aspects (McGann 2002: 19–20): one concerns Byron's "Satanism" and his criminal heroes, and the other is related to how Byron perceived (or imagined) Milton's life, the latter primarily intertwined with Byron's (self-)exile from England. On the appearance of *Cain* (1821–1822), Byron defended himself from the (potential) accusation of blasphemy by referring to Milton, in whose work the figure of Satan is likewise central (McGann 2002: 20–22). Note that Byron considered both the character of God and that of Satan too human-like in *Paradise Lost*, and as such, he deemed them insufficient for representing the relevant principles (McGann 2002: 22–25). Still, this is precisely what makes Milton an important antecedent of the figure of Lucifer

in *Cain*, Lucifer being quite similar to the other criminal heroes of Byron (McGann 2002: 22–25). In line with this, Milton's Satan was an important antecedent of several Byronic heroes, for instance in *Manfred* (McGann 2002: 29).

Regarding evil and/or criminal characters, Byron differs from other Romantic authors in that Byron's texts question generally accepted moral norms, thus forcing the reader to reflect upon the validity of these; this quality largely explains both the success of Byron's relevant works, and their bad reputation (McGann 2002: 27).

The references to Milton's life are largely parallel with the Italian influence appearing in Byron's work (McGann 2002: 30–32); the first explicit reference can be detected in *Don Juan*, in which Byron unambiguously classifies himself as a poet of a quality equal to Milton and Dante (McGann 2002: 32–33). Moreover, in the dedication of *Don Juan* he claims to be the real heir of Milton, while Southey and Wordsworth may only be imitators (McGann 2002: 33–34).

Apart from his literary predecessors, Byron's texts strongly reflect on the readership: this can particularly well be observed in *Don Juan*, in the "preoccupation with the social structure of its rhetoric" (McGann 2002: 38). The problem is essentially as follows: "a writer must have an audience and hence must operate with certain specific sets of audience expectation, need, and desire (…); at the same time, the writer cannot merely attend upon and serve audience" (McGann 2002: 38). Instead, "the audience's social character must be reflected back to itself so that it can 'reflect upon' that reflection in a critical and illuminating way" (McGann 2002: 38). In addition, *Don Juan* constantly reflects on the events of the contemporary world and on the personal life and career of Byron. According to McGann (2002: 45), the "fictive level" of the text "is always calling attention to its narrative (or 'real') level", and the events of the narrative level are often written into the fictive level, thereby blurring the boundaries between the two periods.

Regarding the reflexive relation between the two levels, an embedded poem serves as an excellent example: this is supposedly sung by a Greek poet, but all his statements reflect the stance of *Don Juan*'s narrator, and thus that of Byron (McGann 2002: 45–46). Moreover, the picture of Greece presented in the text is at the same time intended as a criticism of England (McGann 2002: 45–46). The personal aspect can be detected on an intertextual level, too: the song of the Greek poet shows similarities with Byron's lyric poetry, for instance with *On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year* (McGann 2002: 47–48).

Turning back to the relation towards the audience, it is especially true in the case of *Don Juan* that Byron expressly sought the approbation and the recognition of the audience, while mocking them as well, thereby producing a highly ambivalent text, which partially explains the rather controversial reception of the work (McGann 2002: 69–70). On the other hand, as McGann (2002: 80–86) points out in connection with

Fare Thee Well!, the circumstances of publication are also decisive, particularly regarding contemporary reception. This not only means that certain aspects of the author's life are used to interpret parts of the literary text (and vice versa), but also that, using the term of Reiman (1972: 1779), there is a "cumulative effect", whereby the meaning of the text is enriched by the previous accumulations of interpretations and reception (see McGann 2002: 80–86). This can be especially well observed in the case of *Don Juan*, in which Byron practically condenses all of his life and previous works (McGann 2002: 86). This extends to the language of *Don Juan*: it is characterised by ambiguities and coded speech just like other works of Byron (such as *Fare Thee Well!* or *Childe Harold*) or his private correspondence (McGann 2002: 86–88, 110).

Such allusions naturally contribute to Byron's being an author with several masks, as was characteristic of Romanticism; this was in fact the property that influenced contemporaries (such as Baudelaire) the most (McGann 2002: 94–95). The rhetoric structure of poetic masks is essentially the following: Byron adheres to the conventions of Romantic poetry; yet, by , certain gestures, he also alienates himself from these, pointing out that they are untenable (McGann 2002: 95–97). The resulting diversity has the additional effect of Byron's "real self" clearly remaining unreachable via his works even for the contemporary readers (McGann 2002: 97). The alienation from Romanticism creates a reflexive relation: Sentimentalism (in the sense of Schiller), which is typical for Romantic poets, is thematised in Byron's works (McGann 2002: 101–102). Taking the example of humans' relation to nature, the established Romantic convention is that the poetic persona reflects on nature or on solitude in nature, as well as on the loss of the naive (natural) state (cf. McGann 2002: 103). By contrast, in *Childe Harold* (Canto II), Harold not only reflects on these but also on the possibility of reflecting on these. Hence, the text presents a case of secondary reflection (McGann 2002: 103).

Byron's relation to Romanticism is rather complex: while he can be considered a Romantic poet, he is also associated with the criticism of Romantic literature (McGann 2002: 114). This is essentially the reason why he was marginalised, partially already in terms of the contemporary English literary context, and especially regarding the subsequent periods of English literature: he was always assigned a peripheral role in literary narratives, since his oeuvre, taken as a whole, questioned the very foundations of 19th-century English literature (McGann 2002: 114). The disagreement between Byron and the reading public is reflected in Byron's texts, too, as Byron constantly disputes with the readers, who are, according to the texts, rather critical as well; the phenomenon is particularly characteristic of *Don Juan*, in which the act of writing is often the topic of the text (McGann 2002: 115–124).

There is a wide range of readers introduced in the text by Byron since not only specifically named people belong here (such as Hobhouse or Lady Byron) but also certain explicitly identified social groups (McGann 2002: 122). These readers are not only present on the narratological level of the text but also on the rhetorical, dialogical level, and are thus fundamental components of the way the text works (McGann 2002: 122). A further characteristic to be mentioned concerns the relation between the biographical author and the narrator: the text constantly alludes to the two figures being one and the same, while there are several statements explicitly denying the possibility of identification (McGann 2002: 124–126). Note that, strictly speaking, *Don Juan* was published anonymously, though naturally everyone was well aware of the fact that the author was Byron (McGann 2002: 124–126). The debates featured in the text thus have a biographical interpretation as well; this can be observed in the parts mocking Wordsworth and his poetry, even though Byron was unaware of the extent to which Wordsworth was actively set against him after his leaving England (see McGann 2002: 173–175). Lastly, it is worth highlighting that while the narrative of *Don Juan* is explicitly identified as taking place in the period between 1789 and 1824, the referential field of the text is considerably larger (McGann 2002: 213–214).

The analysis by McGann (2002) is undoubtedly an important approach in terms of *Don Juan* as well, since it shows that several points of the text are explicitly related either to other texts or to the events of the contemporary world, thereby establishing a semantic field around the text in which intertextuality and referentiality are explicitly addressed key factors. On the other hand, it can be concluded that these characteristics of *Don Juan* can be observed in other works of Byron as well, though not to the same extent as in *Don Juan*. This rather reflects the social embeddedness of *Don Juan* and naturally cannot answer the question how certain narrative features are related to the genre of the verse novel or to certain antecedents in English literature.

3.1.3 The poetics of digression – Stabler (2002)

The last analysis related to Byron to be discussed is that of Stabler (2002). Stabler approaches Byron's texts (and especially *Don Juan*) from the perspective of poetics, and recognizes the phenomenon of digression to be a fundamental property which allows to deal with *Don Juan* (and, indirectly, the genre of the verse novel) in a formal way and to distinguish it from other texts and/or text types.
Following McGann (1968: 278), Stabler (2002: 3) points out that digression is a feature of Byron's way of writing, whereby digression is more than simply creating distence from the story: it is an important component of poetic composition, and its

various forms show considerable diversity throughout Byron's career. While Byron's contemporaries, such as Scott and Wordsworth, created texts that did not make the readers uncertain, Byron's texts are characterised by sharp changes and by interruptions (Stabler 2002: 3). This can especially well be detected in Byron's satirical texts (Stabler 2002: 10), and, among others, it can be interpreted as an act of questioning the 18th-century aesthetic ideal of the completeness of composition (Stabler 2002: 11).

It has to be stressed that digression not only refers to a deviation from the actual story but also to examples that were perceived as deviations by contemporaries along the lines or as aesthetic or political principles (Stabler 2002: 18). Such cases involve the presence of principles contradicting each other, abrupt changes in tone, and even various forms of personal or cultural allusions (Stabler 2002: 18). The extent of digression may thus vary from words in parentheses or in quotation marks to the major part of a canto's text or of an oeuvre (Stabler 2002: 18). These properties were perceived as uncertainties in terms of composition by contemporary readers, and the relevant critical remarks appeared already in connection with the first two cantos of *Childe Harold*, although they remained in the background due to the Byronic hero's popularity (Stabler 2002: 19). The juxtaposition of serious and comic elements was also interpreted as a destructive force (Stabler 2002: 19–22). Criticism was aroused especially in the case of *Beppo*, that is, when its author was disclosed: the structure based on digressions was familiar from Ariosto's work, hence it was not perceived as destructive by contemporaries in itself, and the same property had a negative association in Byron's works, such as *Childe Harold* (Stabler 2002: 30–31). As is known, the harshest criticism can be observed in connection with *Don Juan*: several contemporary critics mentioned the neglecting and questioning of moral and aesthetic principles as a serious source of danger (Stabler 2002: 33–40).

While the structure based on digressions had been known before Byron as well, its reception was controversial in the 17th and 18th centuries, too; for instance, Pope used it in the footnotes of the *Dunciad* (1729) as a tool of parody (Stabler 2002: 43). On the other hand, the primary role of digression was still highlighting perfect completeness as a compositional form, which is entirely different from Byron's methods involving the juxtaposition of ideas that are otherwise not closely related: 18th-century digression had its own system of rules, and Byron's methods were interpreted against this (see Stabler 2002: 43–46).

Naturally, Byron is not entirely without antecedents in this respect either. Similar digressions can be detected in the poetry of Charles Churchill at the beginning of the 19th century, whom Byron explicitly referred to (see Stabler 2002: 47–50). However, Churchill's reception was rather controversial since, similarly to Byron, he went against the established norm by using personal allusions instead of allusions to the

classics, and he introduced a narrator who frequently interrupts himself (Stabler 2002: 47–50). In turn, Churchill had important antecedents regarding digressions in prose, such as *Tristram Shandy* (Stabler 2002: 51). Interpolations in brackets are characteristic for both Byron and Churchill; these interrupt narration and serve to reinterpret the relationship between the narrator and the reader from time to time (Stabler 2002: 52–53). Although both authors apply several literary and cultural allusions, and they both rewrite and mock epic conventions (cf. Stabler 2002: 55–57), an important difference should be pointed out: while the distinction between high and low culture was markedly present in Churchill's work (as was characteristic of his period), the borderline of the two is blurred in Byron's (Stabler 2002: 57).

Byron frequently applies allusions, and, in contrast to several earlier and contemporary authors, he often uses quotation marks (Stabler 2002: 66–69). This can be a parodic tool, inasmuch as it mocks potential accusers by seemingly defending itself from plagiarism; on the other hand, quotation marks make allusions obvious, and it becomes straightforward for the reader that the text opens towards other texts at the given point (Stabler 2002: 66–69). Allusions very often appear together with digressions, and they tend to question the authority of the preceding literary tradition (Stabler 2002: 71). Due to the radically new treatment of tradition, it is not surprising that a tension almost unavoidably developed between Byron and the reading audience, which is reflected in the texts as well, such as in the introduction of *Marino Faliero* (see Stabler 2002: 99).

It is important to point out that the notes written in prose can play an important role in verse narratives. In Byron's works they are not integer parts of the text (as opposed to contemporary practice, such as in Coleridge): on the contrary, they serve to establish disharmony (Stabler 2002: 77). This is especially true in the case of *Childe Harold*, in which the relationship between the poetic persona and the reader is foregrounded. As established by Barton (1992: 79), the noun *reader* is not present in the text of *Childe Harold*, yet, as Stabler (2002: 77) points out, this is true only for the parts written in verse but not of the notes. Similar to interpolations in parentheses, notes written in prose may interrupt continuous reading (see Stabler 2002: 80).

The importance of *Don Juan* is, among other reasons, that Byron's methods (which he used earlier as well) fully evolve. Several points of the text contain allusions: these undermine the established views concerning literary tradition inasmuch as classical authors appear in a way as if they were contemporaries (see Stabler 2002: 108–109). Hence, tradition is presented as alive on the one hand, while on the other hand it is true that the narrator does not show these authors respect (Stabler 2002: 108–109). Allusions often constitute a complex system: for instance, Canto VI constantly alludes to *Othello* and a contemporary divorce, namely the alleged infi-

delity of Queen Caroline and the related process (see Stabler 2002: 111–122). Importantly, allusions are always closely intertwined with the relation to the reading audience, and can be considered exponents thereof (Stabler 2002: 136).

The analysis by Stabler (2002) is important especially because it perfectly identifies that digression is not only an essential feature of *Don Juan* but it is also a property that had its antecedents in English literature, although Byron's methods were markedly different from the usual and/or canonised forms already known for his contemporaries. From the perspective of the verse novel, this indicates that digressive composition and intertextuality cannot be regarded as incremental elements (or faults) of the text since they are inherently present already in the first text of the genre. In this way, Stabler (2002) makes important claims that concern the narrative structure of the verse novel; however, since her aim was not to provide a detailed narratological analysis, the relation between the properties identified above and other features of the narrative structure remain unclarified. In other words, the peculiarities described by Stabler (2002) do not follow from fundamental structural properties, and, partly due to this, their role in the subsequent genre of the verse novel is not predictable.

3.2 Digressions – reflexivity and the diegetic level

In what follows I will approach *Don Juan* applying the model shown in Chapter 2, examining the narrative peculiarities of *Don Juan*, to be followed by a comparison of these with the narratological properties of *Childe Harold* and of Scott's verse narratives. I will argue that the novelty of *Don Juan* and its markedness with respect to the preceding tradition can be detected in its narrative structure as well; moreover, they primarily follow from that.

As demonstrated in Chapter 2 in detail, verse novels are characterised by reflections on the diegetic and the extradiegetic levels of the text. In much the same manner, there are several examples of the narrator in *Don Juan* reflecting on certain elements in the story, commenting on individual events or characters. An example for this is when the pedagogical methods of Donna Inez, Don Juan's mother, are described; they involve the prohibition of certain books. Regarding Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, the narrator says the following:

> This, too, was a seal'd book to little Juan –
> I can't but say that his mamma was right,
> If such an education was the true one.
> She scarcely trusted him from out her sight;
> Her maids were old, and if she took a new one
> You might be sure she was a perfect fright,
> She did this during even her husband's life –
> I recommend as much to every wife.
>
> (Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto I, stanza 48)

The narrator at this point interrupts storytelling and lingers on the question of pedagogical methods, pretending to agree with the ones applied by Donna Inez (in terms of either her son or her husband). However, his apparent agreement is of course ironic, as it is clear from the text that he has contrary views and considers Donna Inez ridiculous. The structure of the above reflection is based on associations: starting with the ban on a specific book, the narrator elaborates on the entire pedagogical concept, then he moves onto another aspect thereof (that is, the kind of servants Donna Inez hired), finally hinting at how the last point is related to her marriage. The structure based on associations potentially enables digression, yet at this point of the text, the narrator restricts himself to some general remarks and does not turn away from the actual story or the characters.

As was shown by Stabler (2002), digression is a fundamental property of *Don Juan*; the narrator frequently interrupts the narration of the story and digresses at length. I have argued earlier in connection with Hungarian verse novels (see Chapter 2) that the relation between story and digression can be characterised by two basic types. In one case, the story pauses, while in the other case the story goes on in the background; hence, digression results in the narrator lagging behind and missing the opportunity to narrate certain events in due time. Of course, both types are examples of narrative games, since the story does not exist without narration; yet the distinction is relevant inasmuch as the two types differ in the way they interrupt the narrating (and reading) process.

At the beginning of Canto II, the narrator informs the reader that Donna Inez is sending Don Juan to Cádiz, who, still a teenager, has had an affair with a married woman; however, instead of continuing the story, the narrator digresses multiple times, mostly referring to his own experiences regarding Cádiz. While he seems to return to the story in stanza 5, this is exactly the point where he starts digressing extensively; the actual return takes place in stanza 8:

But to our tale: the Donna Inez sent
    Her son to Cadiz only to embark;
To stay there had not answer'd her intent,
    But why? – we leave the reader in the dark –
'Twas for a voyage that the young man was meant,
    As if a Spanish ship were Noah's ark,
To wean him from the wickedness of earth,
And send him like a dove of promise forth.

(Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto II, stanza 8)

It is evident from the very beginning of the stanza that the narrator is aware of the fact that he has been digressing from the actual story more than necessary (which is why digression is not merely an instance of commenting on the story). However, his return is ironic as he does not disclose certain details; moreover, it becomes obvious that Cádiz is not particularly important for Don Juan, since he does not stay there long. Viewed in this light, the preceding digression is even less relevant for the story, as the background information provided by the narrator cannot function as a background to a story set at the given place.

There are similar gestures at several points of the text, and the narrator reflects on his tendency to digress. This is exemplified by the ending of Canto III: according to the story, Don Juan and his lover, Haidée are at a feast where they are entertained by singers (among others); the narrator quotes one of the songs and starts elaborating on theoretical questions related to poetry (stanzas 87–95). The presence of a lengthy digression is crucial because it is already clear from a previous part of the text that Lambro, Haidée's father, has returned to the island, and it is evident that he will take revenge on Don Juan for having seduced his daughter. The young couple's happiness and life are hence in danger (cf. Barton 1998: 195), yet the narrator seems to have forgotten this. Naturally, similar delaying solutions can be detected in earlier texts as well, such as in Fielding's works (see Rimmon-Kenan 1997: 125–126), and the phenomenon can be observed in *Don Juan* (see, for instance, Canto VIII stanzas 48–52, Canto XVI stanzas 77–78). The locus mentioned above is particularly interesting because when the narrator seems to return to the story, he starts reflecting on digression:

But let me to my story: I must own,
 If I have any fault, it is digression;
Leaving my people to proceed alone,
 While I soliloquize beyond expression;
But these are my addresses from the throne,
 Which put off business to the ensuing session:
Forgetting each omission is a loss to
The world, not quite so great as Ariosto.

(Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto III, stanza 96)

Returning to the story is thus merely apparent, since after explicitly declaring that he has been digressing, the narrator does not even touch upon the story, but starts another digression, the topic of which, ironically, being digression (stanzas 97–100). His line of thoughts is interrupted by a further return to the story, this time not merely apparent:

T' our tale. – The feast was over, the slaves gone,
 The dwarfs and dancing girls had all retired;
The Arab lore and poet's song were done,
 And every sound of revelry expired;
The lady and her lover, left alone,
 The rosy flood of twilight's sky admired; –
Ave Maria! o'er the earth and sea,
That heavenliest hour of Heaven is worthiest thee!

(Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto III, stanza 101)

However, this instance of returning is ironic in various respects. The narrator is rather brief in describing the actual state, and the primary piece of information the reader gains is that the feast has meanwhile ended: that is, the events went on during the narrator's digressions, and since the narrator was concerned with something else, the respective events are left un-narrated, and the reader has quasi missed them. Hence, regarding the actual story, the stanza quoted above has only two lines (lines 5–6) that really take a step forward and are related to the protagonists, and these merely inform the reader that the lovers are left alone together at sunset (though the reader is naturally aware that Lambro is nearby).

The other aspect of irony is that the background of the story (that is, sunset) becomes foregrounded along the associations of the narrator, and the narrator digresses again by providing an Ave Maria related to the sunset. The topic of digression is partly the sunset and partly the relation of his Ave Maria to the literary conventions as well as the potential expectations of the readers (stanzas 102–109). This example of digression again ends with a critical reflection on digression having taken place:

> But I'm digressing; what on earth has Nero,
> Or any such like sovereign buffoons,
> To do with the transactions of my hero,
> More than such madmen's fellow man – the moon's?
> Sure my invention must be down at zero,
> And I grown one of many 'wooden spoons'
> Of verse (the name with which we Cantabs please
> To dub the last of honours in degrees).
>
> (Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto III, stanza 110)

However, reflection is rather long this time as well, and contains slighter digressions; hence, the topic of the text is digression again. Moreover, the narrator does not return to the story in the subsequent stanza either, but he ends the canto:

> I feel this tediousness will never do –
> 'Tis being *too* epic, and I must cut down
> (In copying) this long canto into two;
> They'll never find it out, unless I own
> The fact, excepting some experienced few;
> And then as an improvement 'twill be shown:
> I'll prove that such the opinion of the critic is
> From Aristotle *passim*. – See Ποιητικης.
>
> (Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto III, stanza 111)

In this way, narration of the story becomes secondary with respect to the topics preferred by the narrator and with respect to reflections on the nature of the text; digression at this point is thus necessarily intertwined with reflections on the extradiegetic level.

3.3 Polemic – reflexivity and the extradiegetic level

Apart from reflections on the diegetic level and digressions, reflections on the extradiegetic level are also frequent in *Don Juan*, namely in the sense that they constitute an integer part of the narrative structure of the text. Naturally, these reflections show considerable diversity; nevertheless, the following recurrent basic types should be highlighted: the question of digression, the relation of the text to the epic, the moral aspects of the text, and the relation towards other works/authors. The previous section was already concerned with the question of digression as a factor constructing (and deconstructing) the text, whereby the example analysed is probably the most spectacular one; for this reason, I will not address the issue of digression again in the present section.

Defining and reconsidering the relation to the epic are important not least because *Don Juan*, as shown by Fischer (1991), is in many ways connected to the genre of the epic, either in terms of its antecedents (classical epics or mock epics) or in terms of contemporary Romantic experiments. One way of alluding to the epic is to include and transform epic conventions that are recognisable for the reader: as was demonstrated in Chapter 2 in connection with Hungarian verse novels, one such easily accessible feature is the invocation. The beginning of Canto III of *Don Juan* shows a relevant example:

> HAIL, Muse! et cetera. – We left Juan sleeping,
> Pillow'd upon a fair and happy breast,
> And watch'd by eyes that never yet knew weeping,
> And loved by a young heart, too deeply blest
> To feel the poison through her spirit creeping,
> Or know who rested there; a foe to rest
> Had soil'd the current of her sinless years,
> And turn'd her pure heart's purest blood to tears.
>
> (Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto III, stanza 1)

The allusion on invocation is highly ironic for two reasons. First, the invocation terminates after merely addressing the muse, and precisely the actual content of the invocation is covered by the designation *et cetera* and is thus absent: the readers may reconstruct it based on their knowledge of conventions, which, however, does not change the fact that the text does not fulfil the original function of invocation. Second,

the invocation is not only inappropriate but also belated, as it only appears at the beginning of Canto III.

Other parts of the text make it even clearer that epic conventions are empty for *Don Juan*; regarding his plans concerning the work, the narrator says the following in Canto I:

> My poem's epic, and is meant to be
> Divided in twelve books; each containing,
> With love, and war, a heavy gale at sea,
> A list of ships, and captains, and kings reigning,
> New characters; the episodes are three:
> A panorama view of hell's in training,
> After the style of Virgil and of Homer,
> So that my name of Epic's no misnomer.
>
> (Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto I, stanza 200)

The above quotation mocks epic conventions: of course, a text will not qualify as a real epic merely because it uses the epic elements in question; hence, the narrator's claim that his text will be (some sort of) an epic can only be interpreted as an ironic, mocking gesture, which parodies obligatory epic elements. Note that the statement "*my poem's epic*" is ambiguous: the poem may be 'narrative' and 'of the epic genre'; *epic* is not a direct genre designator here. However, the enumerated properties and the mentioning of Homer and Virgil as models straightforwardly point to the epic being a norm for the present text, as does the nominal use of the word (*Epic*) in the last line of the stanza.

Moreover, the narrator presents his work as an epic multiple times, and besides implicitly criticising it, he sometimes explicitly states in what way his own work is better than classic examples of the genre. In the longer argumentation containing the stanza quoted above, veridicality is presented as one such issue:

> There's only one slight difference between
> Me and my epic brethren gone before,
> And here the advantage is my own, I ween;
> (Not that I have not several merits more,
> But this will more peculiarly be seen)
> They so embellish, that 'tis quite a bore
> Their labyrinth of fables to thread through,
> Whereas this story's actually true.
>
> (Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto I, stanza 202)

Hence, the narrator essentially claims that *Don Juan* as a literary work is better than usual epics primarily because its story is real, while the stories in epics are mere fiction; moreover, they are not even credible. The same type of realist aesthetics can be observed later in Hungarian verse novels, too; note that this is not to be understood as the criteria of realist (prose) novels, let alone a prescriptive theoretical interpretation thereof, as can be found in the analysis by Imre (1990).

Clarifying the relation to the epic is chiefly a reaction to certain conventional expectations on the readers' part, and thus qualifies as a self-defence against actual or assumed critical remarks. A similar self-defence can be observed in terms of moral questions: the narrator is often apparently forced to defend his work against the charge of its being immoral; an example for this can be found at the end of Canto I:

> If any person should presume to assert
> This story is not moral, first, I pray,
> That they will not cry out before they're hurt,
> Then that they'll read it o'er again, and say,
> (But, doubtless, nobody will be so pert)
> That this is not a moral tale, though gay;
> Besides, in canto twelfth, I mean to show
> The very place where wicked people go.
>
> (Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto I, stanza 207)

The above quotation is related to epic conventions as well, since Don Juan's ending in hell is related to the descent of the hero to hell; however, locating the text in a moral dimension is more important here. The reader's outcry is hypothetical; yet the narrator, prepared for all events, is ready to defend his work, partly by claiming that the text has been moral so far, and should the reader think otherwise, that must be the result of the reader's inattentiveness. On the other hand, he ironically hints at wicked people going to hell in his text, too; however, as is clear from the entire argumentation, this promise serves to satisfy a rather childish desire on the reader's part. Therefore, the burden of responsibility lies mainly with the reader; hence, narration is allowed to continue seamlessly. Naturally, this does not rule out subsequent defensive parts, which then may refer to specific attacks (see, for instance, Canto IV stanzas 4–7, Canto V stanza 130, Canto XII stanzas 28, 39–40, 50–80, 86).

Debates related to the quality of the text may be manifest in discussing the relation to works of contemporary authors: these are examples of literary debates, and make the text more polemic in nature than the positioning with respect to the abstract

system of epic conventions. The authors criticised and parodied the most are the Lake Poets, primarily Southey and Wordsworth; this is exemplified at the end of Canto I:

> 'Go, little book, from this my solitude!
>   I cast thee on the waters, go thy ways!
> And if, as I believe, thy vein be good,
>   The world will find thee after many days.'
> When Southey's read, and Wordsworth understood,
>   I can't help putting in my claim to praise –
> The four first rhymes are Southey's every line:
> For God's sake, reader! take them not for mine.
>
> (Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto I, stanza 222)

The text is again highly ironic at this point: Southey's text is transferred into a considerably different context (that is, into the text of *Don Juan*). As a result, it appears ridiculous, not least because the gesture of saying farewell to the entire book (envoi) is not applicable in the case of *Don Juan*, since the particular point of the text is merely the end of Canto I, not of the entire work. On the one hand, the narrator has referred to subsequent cantos earlier; on the other hand, Cantos I and II were factually published together, hence continuation was necessarily present (I will return to these questions later in sections 4–6 of this chapter). The tradition evoked here is in fact a standard narratological method: it can be observed as early as Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* in English literature, including the starting "*Go, little book…*" as well. This feature was quite popular in Chaucer's time, going back to Latin literature, and continued to be used after Chaucer (for more information concerning these questions, see Tatlock 1921, Tupper 1917, Engler 1990). However, the gesture at the given point of *Don Juan* is superfluous and theatrical, and as such, it appears as if it were a distinctive feature of Southey's poetry. The two types of text are explicitly contrasted by the narrator, who also clarifies that the kind of literature represented by him is of a better quality than the poetry of Southey and Wordsworth.

Based on the findings presented in this section, it should be clear that the reflections on the extradiegetic level in *Don Juan* (just like ones on the diegetic level) are similar to what has been observed in the case of Hungarian verse novels. It is of course true for *Don Juan* as well that such reflections are fundamental properties of the narrative structure; hence, they are defining elements of composition. In what follows, I am going to show that properties deriving from the basic narrative structure, such as thematising the writing and reading processes, are present in *Don Juan* as well.

3.4 Writing – process and product

In Chapter 2, I argued that Hungarian verse novels often contain reflections on the process of writing and on the product thereof manifest in the form of a book; playing with these notions, as well as mixing the two, may produce apparently paradox parts of the text. The two types can be observed in *Don Juan* as well; moreover, they usually appear together: this is in part related to the fact that the work appeared in sequels (as will be discussed in section 6), but in most cases they are merely narrative games.

As was shown in connection with Hungarian verse novels, evoking the archetypical situation of the poet reciting the story in front of an audience is not an invention of the verse novel. Moreover, verse novels merely evoke the tradition, but they do not use a frame story that would explicitly claim the embedded story to be an oral presentation: on the contrary, narrators in verse novels tend to reflect on the process of writing (as well). In *Don Juan*, such an imitation is unambiguously rejected: Byron parodied the respective tradition in his 1819 preface to the first two cantos. Note that this preface remained unfinished and it was not published in Byron's time; yet it contains important pieces of information for the present investigation. The sharp criticism in there is directed against the preface to Wordsworth's *The Thorn*, in which the readers are asked to imagine that the text of the poem is narrated by the captain of a trading ship. Byron is highly critical towards this method and mocks Wordsworth's request by making a similar one in the preface to *Don Juan* when asking his readers to imagine that the narrator of the text will be a Spanish nobleman:

> The Reader who has acquiesced in Mr W. Wordsworth's supposition that his 'Misery oh Misery' is related by the 'Captain of a small &c.' is requested to suppose by a like exertion of Imagination that the following epic narrative is told by a Spanish Gentleman in a village in the Sierra Morena on the road between Monasterio and Seville – sitting at the door of a posada with the curate of the hamlet on his right hand, a segar in his mouth, a jug of Malaga or perhaps 'right Sherris' before him on a small table containing the relics of an olla-podrida – the time sunset; – at some distance a group of black-eyed peasantry are dancing to the sound of the flute of a Portuguese servant belonging to two foreign travellers who have an hour ago dismounted from their horses to spend the night on their way to the capital of Andalusia; – of these, one is attending to the story and the other, having sauntered further, is watching the beautiful movements of a tall peasant girl whose whole soul is in her eyes and her heart in the dance of which she is the magnet to ten thousand feelings that vibrate with her own.
>
> (Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Preface to Cantos I–II)

As can be seen, Byron is highly ironic with respect to the way of embedding applied by Wordsworth, and he even refers to it as an "*exertion of imagination*". Though criticism is primarily directed against the Lake Poets (and chiefly against Wordsworth and Southey), it must be highlighted that Byron is hostile towards the entire tradition of depicting narrators as archetypical poets. Byron contrasts two written texts in terms of their self-assertion, and the lack of trying to imagine an embedded oral context is true for the text of *Don Juan* itself, contains several reflections on the aspect of writing. This property is fundamental in subsequent verse novels, too, as was shown in connection with Hungarian verse novels.

There are many reflections on the process of writing in *Don Juan*; the end of Canto II shows an example for this:

> In the mean time, without proceeding more
> In this anatomy, I've finish'd now
> Two hundred and odd stanzas as before,
> That being about the number I'll allow
> Each canto of the twelve, or twenty-four;
> And, laying down my pen, I make my bow,
> Leaving Don Juan and Haidee to plead
> For them and theirs with all who deign to read.
>
> (Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto II, stanza 216)

The narrator informs the reader about the present state of the text, comparing the text produced so far to his concept. The focus is thus shifted from the story to the process of writing, which has extratextual aspects as well. The shift is marked especially because Don Juan's story has just arrived at a turning point by Don Juan and Haidée falling in love with each other.

The immediateness of such narrative gestures stems precisely from the fact that the narrator's reflections interrupt the storytelling process, as if the narrator turned towards his audience to comment on his text. Yet, there is an important difference between oral and written poetry in this respect, which is amply reflected on in *Don Juan*, too: the writer has the privilege to abandon the readers and leave the story unfinished, at least temporarily.

It is important to mention that this type of reflection and interruption was naturally given in the case of *Don Juan* inasmuch as *Don Juan* appeared in sequels: Cantos I–II appeared already in 1819, while the publication of Cantos III–V followed only in 1821; hence, the narrative gap reflected on in the text coincided with a factual interruption. This is important because subsequent verse novels that did not appear

in sequels also contain similar reflections, as was shown in Chapter 2 in detail for Hungarian verse novels: hence, the given narrative feature was reanalysed as a genre feature, breaking away from the underlying presence of the original idiosyncrasies of publication.

Though reflections on the writing process are scattered all over the text of *Don Juan*, they constitute a network along the lines of which the changes in the narrator's plans regarding narrative composition are well traceable. Canto II ends in the following way:

> I feel this tediousness will never do –
> 'Tis being *too* epic, and I must cut down
> (In copying) this long canto into two;
> They'll never find it out, unless I own
> The fact, excepting some experienced few;
> And then as an improvement 'twill be shown:
> I'll prove that such the opinion of the critic is
> From Aristotle *passim*. – See Ποιητικης.
>
> (Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto III, stanza 111)

By pointing at the "*tediousness*" of the text, the narrator again refers to his tendency of digressing; moreover, the story is interrupted at a rather tense point here, namely when the life of the hero (and that of his lover) is in danger (moreover, as Barton 1998: 195 argues, Haidée is the only true love of Don Juan). At the same time, it is worth mentioning that the shift is not sharp inasmuch as the narrator has started distancing away from the story earlier; yet the reader is more likely to expect the continuation of the story than the ending of the canto. Digressions procrastinating the narration of important events are attested in the earlier literary tradition as well, and Byron was familiar with the examples from English literature, such as Fielding's narrative technique (see Rimmon-Kenan 1997: 125–126 on that).

At any rate, the narrator interrupts the storytelling process, referring to a compositional problem, namely that the canto is too long already. However, this is in conflict with his previous plans: Canto III consists of 111 stanzas, which is exactly half of Canto I (which has 222 stanzas) and almost half of Canto II (which has 216 stanzas). In this way, "cutting down" the canto into two indicates that the narrator still had the previous plan in mind when he started Canto III, but he changed his mind later. Consequently, apart from reflections on the writing process, the text has a procedural aspect in that the changing plans of the author-narrator can be traced. Note that the plans of the implied author that appear from time to time in *Don Juan*

change rather frequently (see Ackermann 1901: 150). This contributes to the apparently infinite character of *Don Juan*: the text, as well as its projected length, is becoming longer and longer, indicating that there is in fact no underlying plan (see Bacskai-Atkari 2008b: 45–89 for a more in-depth analysis; cf. also Christensen 1993: 215, Manning 1998: 183). The structure loosened this way also adds to the improvised character of the text, which Robson (1963: 92) claims to be a solution for "the problem of the long poem". On the other hand, as indicated by the stanza quoted above, this way of constructing the text is rated as an undesirable quality, hence the narrator of *Don Juan* is arguing against the existing tradition (which can be chiefly detected in the epic), see Ridoneur (1963: 136).

At the given point of the text, the unexpected and arbitrary intermitting of the canto would not have been necessary also because Canto III and IV were published together: hence, the caesura thematised in the text never coincided with a factual caesura. This clearly shows that the gestures of division and of termination can be present even if there is no extratextual reason behind them. This is the way the feature could be interpreted as a generic feature of *Don Juan* and thus be extended to works that never appeared in sequels, as was shown in detail in connection with László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages] in Chapter 2.

In addition, the stanza quoted above seems to highlight an aspect of the writing process that is not supposed to be accessible to the readers, as pointed out in the text. Namely, the narrator creates the impression of writing the first version of the text, which is to be copied later. The first version allegedly consists of a single canto, and includes the remark that the canto should be cut down into two. By contrast, the second version allegedly contains two shorter cantos of approximately the same length and does not include the remark that the canto should be cut down into two, since that has already happened and the narrator does not want the readers to know that he has done so. The obvious discrepancy stems from the fact that the final version of the text is divided; yet it contains the remark in question (which, strictly speaking, should not have been written down by the narrator at all).

At the same time, the contradiction can be resolved by admitting that the narrator simply uses the text as a means of conveying any of his thoughts concerning the writing process, thereby making the writing process devoted to reflections on the writing process.

From a different perspective, this paradox mainly results from actual reflections both on the process and on the product of writing (the latter manifest in the form of a book). As was shown in Chapter 2 for Hungarian verse novels, there are two basic types of reflecting on the book as an artefact: ones concerning the author's plans, and ones affecting the communication with the reader. These types can be detected in *Don Juan* as well.

I argued earlier that the plans sketched by the author-narrator may be subject to considerable changes throughout the whole text, which is closely related to the merger of the implied author and the narrator, as the latter presents himself as the author of the text (and not, for instance, as an editor). At any rate, the book as a format is very consciously reflected on in the text, and the narrator considers questions related to composition and publication at least as important as specific problems concerning the text.

Apart from the length of the individual cantos, their number is subject to several changes in *Don Juan*. While the ending of Canto II (see above) explicitly states that there will be twelve or twenty-four cantos altogether, the following claim can be found in Canto XII:

> Here the twelfth Canto of our introduction
> Ends. When the body of the book's begun,
> You'll find it of a different construction
> From what some people say 'twill be when done:
> The plan at present's simply in concoction.
> I can't oblige you, reader! to read on;
> That's your affair, not mine: a real spirit
> Should neither court neglect nor dread to bear it.
>
> (Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto XII, stanza 87)

I would like to make two observations here. First, the desired length has changed from Canto II in that instead of the original twelve or twenty-four cantos altogether an undefined, yet in any case high number of cantos is planned: the first twelve cantos are reinterpreted as an introduction, which suggests that the entire work will be longer than twenty-four cantos as well. In this way, the plan of the epic is integrated into a constantly changing system of plans. Note that both originally proposed numbers evoke classical setups, as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* both consist of twenty-four cantos, while Virgil's *Aeneid* contains twelve cantos. Regarding the question of the number of cantos seen as an integer part of the classical epic, an interesting point should be mentioned. Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a work of primary importance for Byron, had originally been published in ten cantos in 1667, but when the second edition followed, the poem was reorganised into twelve cantos, most probably precisely in order to follow Virgil's composition (see Hale 1995). My primary concern here is of course not to investigate the prevalence of this epic tradition in detail. Yet it should be underlined that by abandoning the markedly classical epic designs in *Don Juan*,

Byron again very strongly opposes and partly also mocks the epic tradition: the "introductory" twelve cantos of *Don Juan* weigh as much as the entire *Aeneid*.

Second, the narrator admits in the stanza quoted above that his plans are constantly subject to change: they are "*in concoction*". As a result, the entirety of the composition becomes unpredictable, and the narrator's reflections concerning the book as an artefact available for the reader are vague, as can also be observed in the quotation above, with a hint on "*the body of the book*". In principle, the unpredictability of composition could be restricted to the level of narration: in that case, the book would be finished, contrary to the narrator's remarks.

However, as already mentioned, *Don Juan* was published in sequels: Cantos I and II appeared in July 1819; Cantos III, IV and V in August 1821; Cantos VI, VII and VIII in July 1823; Cantos IX, X and XI in August 1823; Cantos XII, XIII and XIV in December 1823; Cantos XV and XVI in March 1824; and Canto XVII remained unfinished. This means that towards the end of Canto XII, when the narrator declares that he so far has produced only the introduction, the reader is supposed to have gone through four books and, judging from the fact that the present one contains only two that no longer qualify as the introduction, there are many more to be expected. Hence, references to the book format have a double nature: on the one hand, they refer to a finite form which the cantos are transferred into at some point during the writing process and which contains frozen text in the sense that the narrator has no direct access to from the ensuing volumes. On the other hand, the structure of the book in the sense of book series is fundamentally non-finite, as so far no volume has proved to be the final one, and there is no foreseeable ending either.

However, a considerable number of reflections refer precisely to the book format. One such example is the envoi in the last stanza of Canto I (see section 3.3 for the analysis). However, references to the book format are not restricted to this last (mocking) stanza, but appear in the preceding one as well, in an even more explicit fashion:

> But for the present, gentle reader! and
> Still gentler purchaser! the bard – that's I –
> Must, with permission, shake you by the hand,
> And so your humble servant, and good bye!
> We meet again, if we should understand
> Each other; and if not, I shall not try
> Your patience further than by this short sample –
> 'Twere well if others follow'd my example.
>
> (Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto I, stanza 221)

As could be observed in the previous examples, references to the book tend to involve the reader to some extent; this is logically so, given that the reader by default encounters the final version of the text published in the form of a book. In the quotation above, the reference to this is even more direct as the narrator refers to his reader as the purchaser. Just as the text receives material form when printed in a book, the reader is suddenly materialised into an agent who is capable of buying that book. The rather material viewpoint adopted by the narrator is further reinforced by his own attitude: he seems to be more concerned with his book being purchased than with his text being read. Ironically, the notion of the purchaser is paired up with that of the bard on the author's part, which is far less material in the sense that this is a relatively archaic notion for a poet. Hence, there is a sharp contrast between the author and the reader, and between the self-image asserted by the author-narrator and his profit-oriented attitude. The clash is of course humorous and adds to the strong reflexive quality of the text in general.

3.5 Reading – a hypothetical dialogue

Such examples of communicating with the reader lead to a question already addressed in Chapter 2 in connection with Hungarian verse novels, namely that the dialogues with the reader have an important part in verse novels, which is especially true in the case of *Don Juan*. Apart from shorter remarks addressed to the reader, there are several examples where the narrator seems to be engaged in a hypothetical dialogue with the reader whose reactions to the text he either anticipates or reconstructs based on previous reactions. Debates with the reader may be devoted to the literary status of the text: for instance, whether the text conforms to the rules of the classical epic, or its relation to contemporary texts (such as those of Southey); several examples for this type were discussed in section 3.4 in detail.

Another typical kind of debate concerns the moral character of the text. Several times, the narrator of *Don Juan* seeks to prove that his text is not immoral, contrary to (potential) charges on the readers' part (see, for instance, Canto I stanzas 120, 207 and 209, Canto IV stanzas 4–7, Canto V stanza 130, Canto XII stanzas 28, 39–40, 50, 86). This can be observed in the following quotation, too:

Haidée and Juan were not married, but
    The fault was theirs, not mine: it is not fair,
Chaste reader, then, in any way to put
    The blame on me, unless you wish they were;
Then if you'd have them wedded, please to shut
    The book which treats of this erroneous pair,
Before the consequences grow too awful;
'Tis dangerous to read of loves unlawful.

(Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto III, stanza 12)

The narrator does not say that the reader will necessarily judge the given point of the text as immoral; yet he clearly supposes that at least some of the readers will think so, which is why he starts refuting the hypothesised arguments of the "*chaste reader*". Apart from hinting at the possibility of the reader's indignation, the narrator sketches a hypothetical act when suggesting that the reader should close the book.

In fact, the narrator's self-defence against the (potential) charge of immorality can be detected as early as in Canto I. Hence, the phenomenon cannot merely be attributed to the actual appearance of such charges after the publication of the first two cantos. As Byron was ready to respond to these within the text, the debate with the reader is a pre-given structural property of *Don Juan*. In the example above, the narrator ironically pretends to take on the role of a moral instructor by benignly urging the reader to close the book; his tone is considerably sharper when defending himself towards the end of Canto I (see section 3.3 for the analysis of the same locus from a different perspective):

If any person should presume to assert
    This story is not moral, first, I pray,
That they will not cry out before they're hurt,
    Then that they'll read it o'er again, and say,
(But, doubtless, nobody will be so pert)
    That this is not a moral tale, though gay;
Besides, in canto twelfth, I mean to show
The very place where wicked people go.

(Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto I, stanza 207)

The narrator at this point deems it necessary to defend his work against certain (but definitely not all) readers: first, he stresses that his text is moral; second, he declares

that if someone should not be able to understand this, it is their fault, not that of the narrator (or of his text). Naturally, the narrator has unlimited possibilities within his own text in comparison to the readers, who do not even have the chance either to express their opinion or to refute the narrator: the narrator not only makes use of his superposition but also underlines it. Of course, the quotation above is highly ironic, and the narrator treats his readers essentially as children, which culminates in the promise of there being a hell in Canto XII.

In sum, the references to the readers and their hypothesised reactions in *Don Juan*, as well as the dialogues sketched by the narrator, are essentially the same as the ones observed in connection with Hungarian verse novels; hence, *Don Juan* has the same generic properties in this respect.

3.6 The origin of special points

As demonstrated in Chapter 2 in detail, the narrator's reflections are scattered all over the text in Hungarian verse novels; yet there are certain special points where such reflections are especially likely to occur, and which are especially suitable for making reflections prominent. The beginning and the ending of the individual cantos are such points, as are the beginning and the ending of the entire work. This is essentially true in the case of *Don Juan* as well, although there are some necessary differences that should be considered; still, the features of *Don Juan* could (and did) serve as examples for later verse novels in this respect.

As already mentioned in section 3.4, *Don Juan* was originally published in sequels; hence, a factual caesura could arise in between the individual cantos. The gesture of closing the canto and taking leave of the reader is in many cases in line with the partial independence of the text. This is exemplified by the ending of Canto II (see the analysis in section 3.4) and its mirroring point at the beginning of Canto III (see section 3.3); similar examples can be detected in the case of all factual caesuras.

More importantly, there are opening and closing gestures even in *Don Juan* that do not correspond to any factual caesura: in fact, this can be observed in most cantos, especially in terms of closing gestures. The phenomenon is exemplified by the ending of Canto I (see sections 3.3 and 3.4), in which case the beginning of Canto II (stanza 5) refers back to the gesture of separation. The ending of Canto III is similar in this respect, as the narrator mentions the necessity of cutting up the canto (see section 3.4), which is continued by an explicit reference to a beginning act when he starts Canto IV:

NOTHING so difficult as a beginning
In poesy, unless perhaps the end;
For oftentimes when Pegasus seems winning
The race, he sprains a wing, and down we tend,
Like Lucifer when hurl'd from heaven for sinning;
Our sin the same, and hard as his to mend,
Being pride, which leads the mind to soar too far,
Till our own weakness shows us what we are.

(Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto IV, stanza 1)

Marking the event of beginning this way is again not compatible with the narrator's claim that he would cut an already existing canto into two, since in that case there would be no opening gesture in the middle of the original canto.

Such examples of dividing the text appearing at the boundaries of cantos without any external reason or a text-internal incentive (that is, other narrative gestures) show that the relevant narrative methods have broken away from their original functions. Hence, *Don Juan* established the tradition of opening and closing gestures at canto boundaries for later verse novels already in a way that these were not necessarily tied to actual caesuras. In *Don Juan*, real and arbitrary caesuras are not distinguishable; that is, they do not show any textual difference (they can only be distinguished based on the publication history of *Don Juan*), and Hungarian verse novels later took advantage of the absence of such distinctions.

Apart from caesuras in between the individual cantos, *Don Juan* shows the feature of setting the goal of the text at the very beginning. The first canto starts as follows:

I WANT a hero: an uncommon want,
When every year and month sends forth a new one,
Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,
The age discovers he is not the true one;
Of such as these I should not care to vaunt,
I'll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan,
We all have seen him in the pantomime
Sent to the devil, somewhat ere his time.

(Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto I, stanza 1)

The quotation clearly indicates that the narrator needs a hero (any hero), primarily because there is no story to be told without one: however, the hero is inherently secondary to the narrator, whose presence in the text is given even if the hero is absent. Don Juan's character is only one of several possibilities (many of these enumerated in stanzas 2–5), and he serves as an excuse for the narrator to speak, as is clear from later parts of the text. Hence, in addition to the specific topic of Don Juan's life, a certain attitude is sketched in the very first stanza.

Regarding the choice of topic, it must also be mentioned that the narrator explicitly states that the chosen topic is well known to the contemporary reader; moreover, maybe too much so. In turn, this further reinforces the possibility of the narrator partly marginalising or interrupting the story, since the reader knows the themse. Concerning the actual implementation, the narrator, as pointed out earlier, has plans already in Canto I, and he makes some predictions concerning length, just as he refers to certain events of the story (such as Don Juan's going to hell). These plans re-appear from time to time at later points of the text and are modified in various ways.

The only special point that is not marked in *Don Juan* is the closing of the entire text, which naturally follows from the fact that *Don Juan* remained unfinished due to Byron's death. As argued in Chapter 2, unfinishedness is an important issue in verse novels as there are other works that remained fragments, though typically not so much due to the author's death, since many authors ceased to write the text well before their death, as in the case of Pál Gyulai's *Romhányi* [Romhányi]. In addition, the conscious lack of rounding off the end of the text became a genre feature, in that many verse novels are actually finished, but the narrator abandons the story (reflecting or unreflecting) at such a point that the feeling of void and the absence of more text increases in the reader. This can be observed in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* already. The actual unfinishedness of *Don Juan* presumably contributed to this genre tradition in an indirect way.

3.7 Byron and subjectivity

As was obvious from the analyses by Fischer (1991), McGann (2002) and Stabler (2002) as well, many features of *Don Juan* have their antecedents in Byron's previous verse narratives, which were closer to contemporary romantic verse narratives in general, and which were received more positively. In this respect, the most important work is *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, in which the subjective tone of the narrator is developed fully for the first time in Byron's oeuvre. On the other hand, this text was very popular, and its impact can be observed in other national literatures, too.

In what follows, I will briefly examine to what extent *Childe Harold* is related to *Don Juan* and thus to the genre of the verse novel (cf. Szegedy-Maszák 1982: 81–82 on the importance of the relatedness of the two texts).

One of the most important features of *Childe Harold* is the central role of the narrator and his dominant position within the text; in addition, the figures of the hero, the narrator and the author are strongly intertwined. From the reader's point of view, this can mainly be observed in that the boundaries among the three are blurred. On the other hand, the text has several layers: apart from the cantos written in verse (the core text), Byron included several footnotes (which were later of course complemented by editorial notes, such as those of Murray) and the prefaces written by Byron should be considered, too. Indeed, footnotes do not have a merely explanatory function: they contribute to the playful character of the text, primarily by constantly forcing the reader to shift between the individual layers. It should be noted that the footnotes are important not only from a structural perspective but also because Byron communicated many of his views this way, especially the ones concerning Greece (cf. Marchand 1971: 94; Elledge 1998: 124–125).

The status of Childe Harold in the text is far from unproblematic: judging from the title *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, he should of course be the hero, who some story is centred on. However, as is indicated already by Byron's preface to the first two cantos, the situation is somewhat different:

> A fictitious character is introduced for the sake of giving some connexion to the piece; which, however, makes no pretension to regularity. It has been suggested to me by friends, on whose opinions I set a high value, that in this fictitious character, 'Childe Harold', I may incur the suspicion of having intended some real personage: this I beg leave, once for all, to disclaim – Harold is the child of imagination, for the purpose I have stated. In some very trivial particulars, and those merely local, there might be grounds for such a notion; but in the main points, I should hope, none whatever.
>
> (Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Preface to Cantos I–II)

Apart from the author alienating himself from the character of Harold, an important feature of the text is hinted at here: Harold's primary function is establishing cohesion in the text, and his character is subsidiary to this function. The claim made in the preface is reinforced by Byron's 1831 addition (made a year later than the original preface; see Bacskai-Atkari 2011b for a more detailed analysis), in which he explains that Harold essentially serves to illustrate the consequences of the "*early*

perversion of mind and morals". Hence, he is intended as a prime example for a phenomenon that is much beyond his personal life.

The functional interpretation of Harold is confirmed by the text. The actual story is minimal: Harold gives up his previous sinful life; he becomes disillusioned and decides to abandon his native land and start travelling. However, his journey is not devoted to his deeds but to what he sees; most of the cantos are devoted to their description. In this way, Harold is the focaliser, from whose viewpoint certain things can be observed, and not the focussed subject of the text. Therefore, the most important aspect of the difference between Harold and the narrator is that Harold functions as the eye and the narrator as the voice. Yet their distinction is still not complete, since the narrator's own ideas are often dominant in comparison to Harold's perception and thoughts, and the reader thus frequently rather encounters the narrator's perception and thoughts. Regarding the distinction between the two figures, alienating gestures from the narrator's part are of key importance. A typical way of achieving alienation is showing Harold's figure: on the one hand, this ensures that the text and the journey depicted in it are coherent; on the other hand, this manifests itself in alienating gestures from a narratological point of view, which mark certain thoughts as alien to the narrator. Hence, the text creates the structural merge of the two figures (the hero and the narrator), which is in turn (partly) overwritten and refined by the narrator's gestures.

However, Harold's character becomes less and less important as the text proceeds, which involves the gradual transformation of the initial structure. While the change is gradual, it can best be detected in Canto III (cf. Galperin 1998: 140). First, the narrator's personal concerns start to be voiced (for instance, he addresses his daughter at the beginning of Canto III). Second, the existence of shared experience can be observed between the hero and the narrator, which can mostly be described by spleen. Third, apart from being the source of the text, the narrator becomes its topic (see, for instance, Canto II stanza 6).

The reevaluation regarding the importance of the two figures relative to each other can also be observed in the following change: while initially the narrator accompanies Harold, towards the end of the text, it seems rather to be the other way round. Moreover, Harold actually disappears from the text, which is linguistically reflected in the loss of his name: if the narrator refers to him at all, he uses the designation "the pilgrim"; hence, Harold is depicted as an iconic figure that has a certain role in the text. On the other hand, the dissolution of Harold is manifest in the merger with the narrator, as shown at the end of Canto IV (see also the preface to the last canto written by Byron, cf. Bacskai-Atkari 2011b):

But I forget. – My pilgrim's shrine is won,
And he and I must part, – so let it be, –
His task and mine alike are nearly done;
Yet once more let us look upon the sea;
The midland ocean breaks on him and me,
And from the Alban Mount we now behold
Our friend of youth, that ocean, which when we
Beheld it last by Calpe's rock unfold
Those waves, we followed on till the dark Euxine roll'd

Upon the blue Symplegades: long years –
Long, though not very many, since have done
Their work on both; some suffering and some tears
Have left us nearly where we had begun:
Yet not in vain our mortal race hath run,
We have had our reward – and it is here;
That we can yet feel gladden'd by the sun,
And reap from earth, sea, joy almost as dear
As if there were no man to trouble what is clear.

(Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV, stanzas 175–176)

However, such a merger of the hero and the narrator excludes precisely the kind of reflexive relation that can be observed in *Don Juan*. Moreover, the narrator in *Childe Harold* is defined rather in a negative way, inasmuch as most of the statements about his person do not tell us who he in fact is but rather who he is not.

In this way, *Childe Harold* can be considered an antecedent for the verse novel primarily due to its subjectivity; in addition, reflexivity is not completely absent either, if one considers the footnotes and their relation to the core text. Most of the footnotes merely serve as explanations, and they contributed largely to the fact that the text of *Childe Harold* was easy to read for the contemporary readers (see Vulliamy 1948: 84). However, several footnotes do not fall into this category and can rather be interpreted as extended grounds for the communication with the reader (cf. Stabler 2002). For instance, in Canto I, the narrator talks about Lisbon and the dangerous situation there (stanza 21), which the footnote provides the following explanation to:

> It is a well-known fact, that in the year 1809 the assassinations in the streets of Lisbon and its vicinity were not confined by the Portuguese to their countrymen; but that Englishmen were daily butchered: and so far from redress being obtained, we were requested not to interfere if we perceived any compatriot defending himself against his allies. I was once stopped in the way to the theatre at eight o'clock in the evening, when the streets were not more empty than they generally are at that hour, opposite to an open shop, and in a carriage with a friend; had we not fortunately been armed, I have not the least doubt that we should have adorned a tale instead of telling one. The crime of assassination is not confined to Portugal: in Sicily and Malta we are knocked on the head at a handsome average nightly, and not a Sicilian or Maltese is ever punished!
>
> (Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, footnote to Canto I, stanza 21)

As far as mere explanation is concerned, the first half of the first sentence would suffice; however, the narrator proceeds onto describing a personal experience, which does indeed contribute to a better understanding, yet is not absolutely necessary. The tone of the quoted part is highly ironic and resembles what is characteristic of the narrator of *Don Juan*.

Similar but less complex examples can be observed at other points of the text as well (see, for instance, the footnote to Canto I stanza 29): hence, whenever the narrator is not explicit enough, the notes may effectively complement the core text. At the same time, this leads to yet another structural merge: the narrator of the core text and the authorial figure in the footnotes are merged. In this sense, the blurring of the boundaries between the hero, the narrator and the author stems from the structure of the text as well, and while their theoretical separation is naturally still necessary, their interrelatedness created by the text should not be neglected either, especially regarding the question of subjectivity. As was already pointed out by Fischer (1991), Harold's character was readily interpreted as Byron's alter ego; one reason for this is that, as I pointed out above, the text suggests the possibility of the relevant identification. However, this involves backgrounding exactly the kind of reflexive relationship that is of key importance in verse novels. Hence, the role of *Childe Harold* in the history of the verse novel can primarily be identified in subjectivity, and to a lesser extent in the amplification of the playing field between textual layers. However, reflections do not take place within a single layer, unlike in *Don Juan* where the reader cannot eschew them; therefore, reflexivity in *Childe Harold* is rather an incremental property.

3.8 Byron and Scott

Finally, I will address the question how *Don Juan* relates to Scott's verse narratives from a narratological perspective. As is evident especially from Fischer (1991), Scott was influential for Byron in several respects, and the two poets are the most important figures and junctions of the English romantic verse narrative. Taking the narratological considerations applied so far into account, the general conclusion is that the complex narrative structure of the Byronic verse novel is not characteristic of Scott's verse narratives; however, there are certain textual properties that make the two types of texts somewhat related. In what follows, only these textual properties will be presented, primarily relying on *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, which shows the most features relevant for a narratological analysis of Scott's verse narratives; beyond this, however, no detailed comparative analysis will be given (see Bacskai-Atkari 2011c).

There are two narrators in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*: the narrator of the frame story and the minstrel. However, the role of the narrator in the frame story is reduced to introducing the minstrel and the (embedded) narrative situation; he remains in the background, and there are no narrative games to be observed at this level of the text. The minstrel is somewhat more personal when narrating; yet the relevant manifestations do not become dominant features of the text. On the other hand, due to the embeddedness of the narrative, the minstrel is perceived as a character by the reader (of the entire work), and the fate of his character is at least as interesting as the story he presents. In this way, there is no narrative agent in the text to assume a superposition (as attested in *Don Juan*) who would appear as a dominant figure with respect to the characters and the readers.

Moreover, the occasional foregrounding of the minstrel can be associated with personal concerns rather than dominance: in most cases, it merely involves the appearance of the narrator's *I* (see, for instance, Canto I stanza 29, Canto II stanzas 16 and 22, Canto III stanzas 3, 15, 22 and 29, Canto IV stanza 13, Canto VI stanza 5). When the minstrel refers to himself, this is often related to the question of the authenticity of the text, that is, the minstrel refers to his sources (e.g. Canto II stanza 22, Canto III stanza 10, Canto V stanza 13). By way of these references, the minstrel refers to an existing tradition, and he considers himself belonging to it; nevertheless, this does not exclude the possibility of truly personal gestures. For instance, he claims multiple times that he is too old to sing about certain topics, especially that of love (see Canto II stanza 30, Canto V stanzas 4–6, Canto VI stanzas 4 and 26). At first sight, this affects narration in such a way that the relevant topics appear to be marginalised; however, the minstrel later overrides his principles concerning text formation, and, referring to his personal memories, he does address these topics

(see Canto II stanza 1, Canto IV stanzas 34–35, Canto V stanzas 2–3). The most personal instance appears at the beginning of Canto IV (stanzas 1–2), where the minstrel alludes to his son's death; the same topic arises in Canto VI (stanzas 1–2), where the Caledonian landscape evokes his personal concerns.

However, the main reason for the foregrounding of the minstrel is that his personal reflections and remarks are always at the beginning or at the end of the individual cantos: the pauses in between the cantos are justified by the old minstrel's getting tired. Hence, these are not examples of arbitrary division, as opposed to the methods of the narrator of *Don Juan* and of later verse novels. Apart from this, there is no interruption in the storytelling process; thus, reflexivity is far less attested than in *Don Juan*, where storytelling is constantly interwoven with the narrator's reflections also beyond certain special points of the text.

Apart from showing the figure of the minstrel, embedding the story allows the narrator of the frame text to put an archaic, even anachronistic, literary form into its own literary context (cf. Cronin 2000: 97–98): the authentic narrator of such a text is the minstrel, and its authentic listeners are the lady of the castle and her court. Authenticity holds even though the minstrel is the last one of his profession (and as such, he is not a member of the classical generation he evokes), while the listeners are not members of a medieval court but their descendants. Yet, the connections between the two periods are clearly recognisable, and both are distant from the 19th-century reading audience. Within the authentic narrative situation, the minstrel as a narrator does not criticise the previous literary tradition; on the contrary, he tries to adhere to it, and he deems his poetry and performance to be less worthy. His person is clearly secondary to the task of narrating the story, which is also why there are no narrative gestures interrupting and/or disturbing the storytelling process.

Another important difference between Scott's minstrel and Byron's narrator concerns the relationship to the audience: the minstrel is not in a dominant position with respect to his listeners, partly because he is not writing the text; hence, any reflections concerning writing and reading are absent. Moreover, the minstrel is exposed to his audience not only because he would not be able to disregard any negative feedback, but also because his listeners are precisely the ones who offer him shelter.

Therefore, his remarks addressing the audience in most cases do not aim at distancing away from the story, but are rather gestures that serve to strengthen and emphasise the connections between the story and the listeners (see, for instance, Canto II stanza 1, Canto III stanza 33, Canto V stanza 1). Special cases of this involve referring to the presumable reactions of the audience (for example, Canto II stanza 16, Canto III stanza 15, Canto V stanza 5), and stressing that the lady of the castle is the descendant of the characters depicted in the story (especially in Canto IV stanza 10 and subsequent stanzas).

However, none of these features involves a critical attitude towards either the story or the listeners. The only slightly parodistic part can be found in Canto II (stanza 29), where the minstrel refers to the potential expectations of the audience with respect to how the lovers will swear fidelity to each other. The possibility referred to by the minstrel is exaggerated, and hence somewhat parodistic, indirectly affecting the listeners as well. However, the main reason for the minstrel to reject producing such a text is not that he does not appreciate it as a valid form but because he considers himself unfit (and too old), which considerably softens the parodistic aspect.

True criticism can be detected in Canto IV stanza 34, where the minstrel argues that many other singers embellish their stories to such an extent that it is no longer trustworthy. However, criticism does not target the audience but the minstrels who have broken away from the authentic tradition and are producing a different kind of poetry, which is also worse. In this respect, the minstrel's own text is interpreted as one of a higher quality, even if he otherwise deems himself inferior to his masters.

In sum, it should be clear that while *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* is far from being uninteresting from a narratological point of view, and, as opposed to Scott's other verse narratives, reflexivity can be especially well observed in that poem, the narrative structure established for *Don Juan* and later verse novels cannot be detected. It can be concluded that Scott was indeed an important antecedent for Byron and that the oeuvre of the two poets are closely related to each other in terms of the English romantic verse narrative. At the same time, Byron's narrative technique involves not only a quantitative but also a qualitative change: Byron does not merely use Scott's methods more extensively, but most of the elements of his kind of narrative structure are either entirely absent from Scott's work or they can be observed only to a minimal degree.



The mock epic and the verse novel

In this chapter, I will examine the relationship between the mock epic and the verse novel in detail, primarily concentrating on the question how the separation of the two genres can be facilitated by investigating their respective narrative properties. As should be clear from the preceding two chapters, the mock epic is on the one hand an important antecedent for the verse novel, while, on the other hand, both genres intensively reflect on the epic and parody it. Therefore, the question is in what way the verse novel differs in terms of mocking the classical epic, and how a given text can be grouped either as a mock epic or as a verse novel based on the presence or absence of certain, primarily narratological, features. The relationship between the two genres is highly important both in English and in Hungarian literature: in the English context, the most important impact comes from Pope, while in Hungarian literature, the comical works of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz appear as similar potential antecedents. Apart from whether and to what extent an impact can be detected, it must also be considered whether the two genres were perceived as separate by contemporaries. As was pointed out earlier, Byron's *Don Juan* was not treated as a verse novel for obvious reasons, which also allowed for partly treating it as some sort of mock epic, as is sometimes done by modern literary criticism. By contrast, Hungarian verse novels were unambiguously perceived as verse novels and not as mock epics. Since the connection between Pope and Byron has extensively been analysed in the relevant literature, I will concentrate on Hungarian mock epics. I will start with reviewing relevant analyses concerning the Hungarian mock epic and the phenomenon of the mock epic in European literature in general, and then I will examine the relation between the mock epic and the verse novel in the narratological framework presented in the previous chapters.

4.1 Earlier accounts

As should be clear from the introduction, the relationship between the verse novel and the mock epic is interesting especially due to their inherent similarities. Apart from purely theoretical concerns, distinguishing the two is a sensitive question because their relation is also a matter of genre development, inasmuch as the mock epic is an antecedent of the verse novel. In addition to general questions, this raises specifically narratological problems, and since, as pointed out in the preceding chapters, the verse novel can be defined based on primarily narratological grounds, it follows logically that the differentiation from the mock epic should be carried out along narratological lines. As far as the theory is concerned, this naturally means

that if the inherent narratological properties of the verse novel are sufficient for defining the genre on structural terms, the same properties should not be attested in the mock epic (or any other genre), or at least to a significantly lower degree.

The main questions are thus to what extent the mock epic is reflexive in comparison to the verse novel, and to what extent the figure of the narrator becomes prominent. Both questions naturally relate to the diegetic and the extradiegetic level alike. While the diegetic level is relevant mainly in terms of how the story is presented, in terms of the extradiegetic level the question of reflecting on the genre arises as well. The mock epic is by definition in constant interaction with the classical, serious version of the epic, which does not automatically involve the presence of explicit reflections, as the epic is evoked merely by adhering to or imitating certain formal properties for the reader, especially for contemporary readers who were familiar with the epic genre. Hence, the fundamental difference(s) between the verse novel and the mock epic should be sought in the proportion between mere evocation and explicit reflections, as well as the way they are carried out.

Finally yet importantly, the differences in the national literatures in question must also be considered: that is, how embedded the relevant mock epics were in the literary context, especially regarding their specific narrative structure. Strongly connected to this, it must also be examined to what extent there is a direct connection between Hungarian mock epics and verse novels (as there was one between English mock epics and Byron's *Don Juan*).

4.1.1 The parody of the classical epic – Kiss (1978)

When providing a generic definition for the mock epic (or heroi-comical poem), Kiss (1978: 432) states that the mock epic is a parody of the classical epic, and as such the only type of parody that is established as an independent genre with its own genre designation. The model of the genre, in an inverse fashion, is the genre of the epic. That is, the mock epic typically relies on the epic in general or is related to several representative examples, but it is also frequent for mock epics to be dependent on a single heroic poem (either a classical epic or an established national heroic poem of the period), see Kiss (1978: 432). Regarding length, mock epics are definitely shorter than classical epics; apart from mocking the epic, they frequently apply contrasting; that is, while they keep and/or imitate the conventions, forms and language of the epic, they are centred on an everyday subject, sometimes even on a base one (Kiss 1978: 432–433).

The mock epic is an established genre from the 17th to the 19th century, with considerable differences among the individual national literatures: while the genre is largely obsolete at the turn of the 18th to the 19th century in Western Europe, this is

exactly the time when it started flourishing in Central and Eastern Europe (Kiss 1978: 433). At the same time, the generic antecedents go back to antiquity, to a lesser extent to the *Margites* and primarily to *Batrachomyomachia*, mistakenly attributed to Homer for a long time (Kiss 1978: 433–434). The impact of the latter can also be seen in the large number of translations and imitations, among those Mihály Csokonai Vitéz's travesty entitled *Békaegérharc* [Battle of Frogs and Mice] from 1791–1792, see Kiss (1978: 434).

One of the most important examples (internationally) is Tassoni's *La Secchia Rapita* [The Stolen Bucket] from 1622, which Csokonai also referred to (Kiss 1978: 434). This text is important primarily because the depicted battle is fought by humans and not by animals, while the cause of the conflict (the stolen bucket) is quite banal. By contrast, the cause of the conflict in Csokonai's *Békaegérharc* is significant on its own level, as the drowned mouse used to be a prince among the mice (Kiss 1978: 434).

It is also important to mention Boileau's *Le Lutrin* [The Lectern] from 1764–1783, in which Boileau, as he described in his poetics, intended to illustrate that it is possible to write an epic even if the topic is prosaic and petty. Moreover, he intended to show that it is possible to write such an epic in a way that serious and comical elements are not mingled, as opposed to the French and Italian epics preceding Classicism (Kiss 1978: 435). However, precisely by applying the style and formal properties characteristic of serious epics, Boileau willingly or unwillingly degrades the style and the features of heroic poetry and is highly satirical towards the participants of the petty conflict (Kiss 1978: 435).

At any rate, Boileau's work had a significant impact on European literature, with examples such as Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* or *Dunciad* (Kiss 1978: 437). Naturally, Pope's works had their antecedents in English literature as well, such as Crown's *The History of the Famous and Passionate Love*, Garth's *Dispensary*, and Dryden's *Mac Flacnoe* from the end of the 17th century (Kiss 1978: 437). Pope followed Boileau to a significant degree; yet he was highly innovative as well. For instance, the contrast between heroic and comical is not restricted to the contrast of an elevated language and a trivial topic (Kiss 1978: 437–438). On the one hand, the characters are characterised by a mixture of heroic ideals and triviality, and on the other hand, the language they use is not one used in epics but conversational language; that is, a somewhat elevated version of everyday language (Kiss 1978: 437–438). In this sense, Pope did not aim at the parody of the classical epic but rather intended to create an equal, comic counterpart (Kiss 1978: 438).

Pope's innovations are naturally important from a generic point of view as well, since many subsequent mock epics show the direct influence of *The Rape of the Lock*, both in English and in Continental European literature (Kiss 1978: 439). In English literature, the genre saw a rapid decline in the 18th century: the last examples are Chatterton's *Consuliad* and Brice's *Mobiad*, both from 1770 (Kiss 1978: 439). By contrast, the

genre continued well into the 19th century on the Continent, as in many literatures it was established only in the second half of the 18th century (Kiss 1978: 439–440).

In Hungarian literature, the most important authors are Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, Sándor Petőfi and János Arany (Kiss 1978: 440–442). Csokonai is important for two main reasons. First, he is the author of the first Hungarian mock epic, *Dorottya* [Dorottya], and his earlier works such as *Az istenek osztozása* [The Contest of the Gods] and *Békaegérharc* show relevant properties, too (Kiss 1978: 441). Second, Csokonai is the first (and for a long time the only) theoretician of the genre, who considered theoretical and historical aspects of the genre in his preface to *Dorottya* and in his essay *Az epopeáról közönségesen* [On the Epic in General], see Kiss (1978: 441). He also distinguished the genre of the heroi-comical poem (termed by him "furcsa vitézi versezet", literally 'strange/comical heroic poem') from travesty: in heroi-comical poems, the events are ridiculous, not the way of presenting them (Kiss 1978: 441). Csokonai was chiefly influenced by *The Rape of the Lock*; in turn, Csokonai's influence can be detected best in Petőfi's *A helység kalapácsa* [The Hammer of the Village], both in terms of *Dorottya* as a model and of Csokonai's theoretical concerns (Kiss 1978: 441–442). Petőfi's text is in many ways markedly different in that it was defined by the literary folklorist trend rather than by classicism; yet Petőfi termed his work a heroi-comical poem (komisches Heldengedicht), see Kiss (1978: 441–442).

Since Kiss (1978) concentrates solely on certain questions regarding the mock epic, he does not investigate the relationship between the mock epic and the verse novel. His insights are important for the present investigation primarily for two reasons: first, it helps in understanding the relationship between the mock epic and the classical epic; second, it highlights the most crucial differences between English and Hungarian literature. Accordingly, the mock epic was outdated in English literature at the time when the Byronic verse novel was born, while it was very much alive in 19th-century Hungarian literature and its timespan considerably overlapped with that of the verse novel. As was shown in Chapter 3, Pope was an important antecedent for Byron, and if the mock epic was similarly important for the Hungarian verse novel, the question arises why the Hungarian verse novel did not appear earlier. Moreover, as Kiss (1978) does not approach the topic from a narratological point of view, he naturally does not investigate the narratological properties of the mock epic (if there are any) that could structurally distinguish it from the classical epic and from the verse novel.

4.1.2 The mock epic and its variants – Robertson (2009)

Before turning to these questions, let me briefly review the analysis by Robertson (2009), who concentrates on the history of mock-epic poetry in Europe (in the period between Pope and Heine) and on related theoretical questions; additionally, he discusses Byron's *Don Juan* in this context.

First, while the epic was (again) flourishing in the Renaissance, it started to become anachronistic from the middle of the 17th century onwards (Robertson 2009: 16–22). The marginalisation of the epic went in parallel with the rise of the novel, so that epics even came to be translated into prose, with associated alterations (making the text more exciting, more novel-like), see Robertson (2009: 23–24). This was accompanied by a change in the reading audience: while epics were primarily read by men, novels were mostly read by women (Robertson 23–24). Viewed in this light, it is not surprising that the novel was frequently defined as a modern epic in the 18th century. Fielding did so in the preface to *Joseph Andrews* (1742), in which he referred to the novel as a "comic Romance" or a "comic Epic-Poem in Prose", and Friedrich von Blanckenburg did the same in connection with the works of Fielding and Wieland (Robertson 2009: 24). The type of novel defined this way was contrasted with the sentimental version of the novel associated with Richardson, which was condemned both by Fielding and by von Blanckenburg (Robertson 2009: 24). Deriving the novel from the epic (including the mock epic) unambiguously served the goal of presenting the novel as a serious genre, often labelled with the attribute "masculine" (Robertson 2009: 24–26). This line of thought came to be well established based on von Blanckenburg and Goethe and can be observed till the 20th century (Robertson 2009: 26–27).

At the same time, the importance of the epic can be observed not only in the way the novel quasi took over its role, but also in that several epics appeared even at the beginning of the 19th century (Robertson 2009: 27–28). This is shown by English literature as well. Byron in his *Don Juan* criticised the mass production of epics: more precisely, the fact that Southey produced a new epic almost every year (Robertson 2009: 27–28). Regarding the status of the epic, Robertson (2009: 29) arrives at the conclusion that it came to be a static genre in a way: on the one hand, its cultural prestige was still enormous; on the other hand, the popularity of the individual works was rather short-lived.

As Robertson (2009: 32) argues, the peculiarity of the epic genre is not in the least the fact that any new text was predefined by a severe system of rules that was perceived to be of eternal value to such an extent that cannot be observed in the case of any other genre. That is, the poet is supposed to adhere to the rules and norms at all events, otherwise the resulting text is interpreted as a bad epic. Precisely because of this, the epic easily became the target of parody: this was fulfilled by the mock epic, which existed

in parallel with the serious epic, and did not question or annihilate the validity thereof (Robertson 2009: 32). At the same time, it is also true that the mock epic was from the very beginning critical towards the value system of the classical epic, even though the critical stance was only moderately expressed (Robertson 2009: 32). For instance, military actions and soldiers have a crucial role in the classical epic, and everything else, including romantic aspects, are subordinated to these. A moderate yet clear contrast to this is exemplified by Byron's *Don Juan*, in which the hero is unambiguously tied to romantic adventures, and while he intends to participate in the siege of Ismail, he ends up there only by accident (Robertson 2009: 32–34).

Mock epics in the 18th century found important models in Italian mock epics, especially Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* [The Frenzy of Orlando] from 1532 and Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* [Jerusalem Delivered] from 1581, see Robertson (2009: 35). Voltaire praised "the naturalness of his verse, the wealth of his invention, and his success in interesting us in the fates of his characters while retaining a humorous distance" (Robertson 2009: 35). These Italian mock epics were popular and renowned essentially till the middle of the 19th century; they are characterised by the use of *ottava rima*, and they were strongly inspired by the poetry of late medieval minstrels and their relevant topics (Robertson 2009: 36–37). Ariosto is especially important because his narrator is strongly foregrounded; for instance, he reflects on the story and selected issues thereof at the beginning of almost every single canto; this tradition is continued by Byron and Heine later (Robertson 2009: 39). In addition, the narrator frequently steps forward when there is a topical change, and he often explicitly reflects on the poetic solutions applied; moreover, it is not rare that the narrator leaves his heroes alone at critical moments in the story to change to a different thread (see Robertson 2009: 39–40).

Both heroi-comical poetry and travesty are built on the separation of stylistic registers going back to Antiquity: in heroi-comical poetry, an elevated style is paired up with simple topics, while in travesties grand topics are narrated in simple or vulgar style (Robertson 2009: 49–50). The prototype of heroi-comical poems is the *Batrachomyomachia*, which was translated into English by George Chapman around 1624 (Robertson 2009: 50); between the 16th and the 18th century, authors like Tassoni, Boileau and Pope created texts in the genre (Robertson 2009: 50–54). Both Boileau's and Pope's texts are characterised by placing a banal topic into the centre, as well as by the text calling the reader's attention to the banality of the topic early on (Robertson 2009: 55–56). Apart from banality, the everyday nature of the text is strengthened by the fact that the various supernatural powers prove to be unnecessary in terms of the plot since they are in fact unable to effectively intervene (Robertson 2009: 57–58).

The target of travesty can be either a specific work or a genre (such as the chivalric romance mocked in *Don Quixote*). Due to the immediate connection to the parodied text, travesties are typically short-lived; hence, only few of them are known today, although it is important to highlight that several travesties were written throughout literary history (Robertson 2009: 59–61). Travesty became popular in Italy towards the end of the Renaissance period, and it spread in the middle of the 17th century first to France and then to England (Robertson 2009: 62). Regarding French literature, Paul Scarron and Pierre Marivaux should be mentioned; in the case of both authors, it is frequent that the narrator addresses the reader and reflects on the process of writing (Robertson 2009: 62–64, 66–67). Scarron was even imitated by several authors, including Charles Cotton in English literature, although Cotton's style is expressly obscene, as opposed to Scarron's (Robertson 2009: 64–66). Obscenity is not in the least alien to travesty, and as such, it was decisive in the general perception of the genre as well: for instance, in German literature it fundamentally contrasted with the principles of Weimar aesthetics and was largely rejected both by Schiller and by Goethe, even though Schiller appreciated some works of Blumauer (Robertson 2009: 68–70).

Turning back to the mock epic, Robertson (2009: 71), following Erskine-Hill (1964), claims that the chief difference between heroi-comical poems and mock epics is that heroi-comical poems are loosely related to the epic tradition, while mock epics constantly reflect on it. Both types can be found in Pope's oeuvre, the *Dunciad* being a heroi-comical poem and *The Rape of the Lock* being a mock epic. Regarding the *Dunciad*, Roberson (2009: 73) identifies three important topics that Pope criticises in his text, even though he partly uses them or is directly involved: these are philology, the commercialisation of literature, and popular culture.

The criticism directed at philology is partly due to a personal offense, since Pope also prepared an edition of Shakespeare according to his own principles, which was harshly criticised for its imprecisions by Lewis Theobald, an excellent philologist of the time (Robertson 2009: 78–85). As a result, Pope attacked Theobald directly in several of his texts, while the main target in the *Dunciad* is an even more important philologist, Dr Richard Bentley (see Robertson 2009: 78–85). The commercialisation of literature is likewise not merely a theoretical issue, given that Pope had excellent business skills; rather, the text contains critical remarks directed at specific people for personal or at least subjective reasons, as in the case of Pope's criticism against Eliza Haywood, his successful contemporary author (Robertson 2009: 86–92). Attacking popular culture is to a large extent a tendency characteristic of the period in question, in which high culture started to separate from popular culture, perceiving and depicting the latter as vulgar, while in Romantic literature "it would be rediscovered and revalued as folk culture" (Robertson 2009: 93). Apart from traditional

shows, pageants, and fairs, Pope's criticism was directed at the Italian opera as well (Robertson 2009: 93–96).

Following Fowler (1982), Robertson (2009: 99) argues that mock epics in English literature appearing after the *Dunciad* are essentially imitations of the *Dunciad*, with examples such as Churchill's *Rosciad*, Chatterton's *Consuliad*, and, in a broader sense, even Fielding's *Veroniad*. The genre started diminishing only in the 1810s, until which more than 200 mock epics with a title ending in *-iad* can be detected (see Bond 1929).

In French literature, Voltaire's *La Pucelle* has to be mentioned; an important antecedent for this was Voltaire's serious epic *La Henriade*, which largely follows epic conventions while it shows several deviations as well: for instance, it is centred on a historical topic that belongs not too far to the past (Robertson 2009: 130–139). Voltaire's *La Pucelle* primarily shows the impact of Ariosto, while for *La Henriade* Tasso was more important (Robertson 2009: 139–157). Furthermore, *La Pucelle* mocks both modern and classical epic conventions, and because of its theme (Joan of Arc), it goes against certain Christian conventions as well (Robertson 2009: 139–157). This is one of the reasons why it was not only a success, but it also provoked uproar, and it often ended as one of the favourite readings of libertine characters in literary tradition (Robertson 2009: 139–157).

In German literature, Voltaire's impact can best be observed in the poetry of Wieland, who was at the same time more moderate than Voltaire; regarding the mock epic, his *Oberon* (1780) should be mentioned (Robertson 2009: 158). Wieland distanced himself from the serious epic even more than Voltaire did, and, following Pope, he planned to write the German *Dunciad* (Robertson 2009: 159–160). His verse narrative *Idris und Zenide* (1767) explicitly addresses the question of the epic: among others, it is claimed that the epic has become tedious, and the narrator often compares his narrative methods with the way a Homeric epic would be constructed (Robertson 2009: 160). Apart from *Oberon* and *Idris und Zenide*, Wieland has a third work more similar to the mock epic: *Der neue Amadis* (1771); all the three show the impact of various sources, the most important being probably Ariosto, the genre of the medieval romance, and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Robertson 2009: 162).

Wieland's *Idris und Zenide* contains several unfinished stories, and the narrator often reflects on the plot, partly arguing with an imaginary female reader: with respect to such interruptions of the story, Wieland claimed to follow other authors of fairy tales (Robertson 2009: 179). In addition, it should most probably be reckoned with Sterne's impact (see also Sengle 1949: 215; Michelsen 1962: 1999). His *Der neue Amadis*, as its title indicates, is strongly intertextual: other texts are not only evoked but also directly adapted: the story itself becomes secondary to the intertextual and metatextual narrative games (Robertson 2009: 182–183). Finally, *Oberon* defines itself as a romantic heroic poem (romantisches Heldengedicht), and its opening "parodies an epic

invocation by inviting the Muses to saddle the hippogriff for a return to" what he calls the "old romantic land" (Robertson 2009: 185).

Another important example from German literature is Goethe's verse narrative *Hermann und Dorothea* (1797), which shows the impact of the Homeric epic and the pastoral idyll as well (Robertson 2009: 198). Partly due to its militant ending, the poem came to be one of the fundamental texts of German nationalism; thus, its impact was large and diversified (see Robertson 2009: 198–199). Goethe, following Voss, wrote the text in hexameters and often used Homeric epithets, resulting in a contrast with the ironic, parodistic content (Robertson 2009: 215). Irony is built on contrast in several respects: it "comes not only from the structural contrast between the great and the small worlds, but also from the diverse points of view within the small world" (Robertson 2009: 227). However, "the Homeric style and the modern content are not always discrepant": for instance, Hermann's portrayal as a comic hero is paired up with the background assumption that he is a potential (modern) hero (Robertson 2009: 228). In addition, the text contains several mock-heroic passages, which "can be difficult to interpret and even to identify" within the context of "a work which is not mock heroic as a whole" (Robertson 2009: 230). Similar phenomena can be observed in William Cowper's work (Robertson 2009: 230–232).

Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea* is to a great extent an answer to the French Revolution; the criticism of the Revolution is even sharper in Austrian literature, for instance in Joseph Franz Ratschky's *Melchior Striegel*, which shows the impact of English satirical literature, yet cannot be regarded merely as an imitation (Robertson 2009: 237–240). Ratschky considered Samuel Butler, the author of *Hudibras*, to be his model: by indicating this connection, Ratschky provided the contemporary reader with an obvious clue that his satire would be directed at the French Revolutionaries as much as Butler's was at the Puritans (Robertson 2009: 241–242). Up until Byron, Butler was unique in English literature in the way he played with rhymes, and the role of language was even more important for Ratschky (Robertson 2009: 248–249). Since his work has political aspects, Ratschky often criticises some of his contemporaries directly (Robertson 2009: 251–253). In addition, the text shows several intertextual features, including allusions, and its language is playful as well, often showing the playing with rhymes (Robertson 2009: 255–259).

Regarding Austrian literature, Aloys Blumauer's *Aeneis* should of course be mentioned as well, which is a travesty of Virgil's original: at first, Blumauer only prepared the travesty of Canto II, but due to its enormous success, he started to add the other cantos even though he never accomplished a complete version (Robertson 2009: 260). There had been various travesties of Virgil's *Aeneis* before Blumauer, too, which Blumauer partly relied on: examples include the texts of Scarron and especially those of Johann Benjamin Michaelis (Robertson 2009: 261–272). However,

Blumauer is not as sharp and vulgar as Scarron; hence, most of his contemporaries (Schiller being an exception) reacted in a positive way, even though, especially after Blumauer's death, the anticlerical aspects of the work were harshly criticised (Robertson 2009: 261–272). Travesty is largely based on making heroes appear commonplace: this includes the description of hedonistic meals, the featuring of defecation, as well as making heroes appear in underwear (or at least not fully dressed, and in some cases even naked), see Robertson (2009: 272–279).

Not only classical epics from Antiquity can be targeted by parody: Évariste-Désiré Parny's *Le Paradis perdu* is a parody and a critique of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Robertson 2009: 287–298). An important tool of parody is shortening. Parny's text is considerably shorter than Milton's, and the resulting condensation of the events has a comic effect; as the text proceeds, Parny deviates from the original more and more, turning it inside out, especially by placing the war in heaven into the centre (Robertson 2009: 287–288, 291–292). To a lesser extent, Milton's parody can be observed in *La Guerre des dieux* as well, which is even stronger in its attack on established Christian dogmas (see Robertson 2009: 298–311).

For Robertson (2009), Byron's *Don Juan* is also part of the heroi-comical tradition of the epic, not in the least because Byron's heroi-comical models (Ariosto, Pulci, Tasso) were clearly recognisable for contemporaries like John Richard Best (Robertson 2009: 321). Byron's immediate model was actually John Hookham Frere's *The Monks and the Giants*, the tone of which Byron employed first in *Beppo* and subsequently in *Don Juan*: Frere's text is characterised by humour and by a personal tone, and several digressions can be observed (Robertson 2009: 322–324). Relatedness to his antecedents partly involves examples of free translation as well, for instance from Pulci; yet the satirical tone of *Beppo* was rather influenced by the satires and erotic verse narratives of Abbate Giambattista Casti (Robertson 2009: 325–328, partly based on Vassallo 1984).

In addition to the well-known Italian influence, German models are also important to consider, since Byron was able to read several works in translation that are relevant in terms of the mock epic, and he highly appreciated the works of Goethe, Schiller and Grillparzer (Robertson 2009: 328). Most importantly, Wieland's *Oberon* was available to him in William Sotheby's translation, and Byron had a high opinion of Sotheby, too; *Don Juan* shows several similarities to *Oberon*, such as the episode concerning the Oriental sultaness trying to seduce the hero (Robertson 2009: 328–330).

Apart from the relatedness to mock epics, the relation to the serious epic is also a relevant and explicitly present topic in *Don Juan*. Byron was critical of the Homeric epics, and the plan of writing a serious epic in *Don Juan* can only be interpreted as a joke (Robertson 2009: 331–332). Especially the *Iliad* attracts criticism, as several parts praising warship were seen as a problem by many (including Blake) from the end of the 18th

century onwards, resulting also in a preference of the *Odyssey*: in line with this, the structure of *Don Juan* is more similar to that of the *Odyssey* (Robertson 2009: 333–336).

The tone of *Don Juan* considerably imitates spoken language and as such can be interpreted as going back to the authentic, oral tradition of the epic, which has since become artificial (Robertson 2009: 344). Apart from the importance of the oral tradition, the relations between *Don Juan* and other (written) texts have to be stressed; that is, the fundamental and constantly declared intertextuality, which follows a basic technique of mock epics in evoking and parodying certain texts or text types (Robertson 2009: 344–349).

For Robertson (2009: 349–350), the mock epic is primarily a genre of the Enlightenment, and while Byron is generally considered to be one of the most important Romantic authors, he was strongly under the influence of the Enlightenment: using the phrase of McGann, he was 'a Romantic son of the Enlightenment' (McGann 1976: 147). According examples include the scepticism and atheism that can be observed in *Don Juan*; moreover, Byron not only applies already existing ideas but he also develops them further: for instance, he is sceptical even towards scepticism (Robertson 2009: 350–352).

Byron's impact on the genre of the mock epic is not negligible; yet the mock epic came to be less and less popular during the 19th century. Robertson (2009: 370–415) considers Heine's *Atta Troll* to be the last significant mock epic in the strict sense. While Heine was indeed and unquestionably a follower of Byron to a certain extent, he was influenced more by *Childe Harold* than by *Don Juan*, as was customary in German literature (Robertson 2009: 370, 379–380; regarding German literature, see Pointner and Geisenhanslüke 2004). Still, *Don Juan* was also read and translated, and generally acknowledged; its influence can be observed in *Atta Troll* as well, partly in the way the genre of the epic is reflected on, and partly in the structure based on the juxtaposition of opposites (Robertson 2009: 371–373). However, an even more important antecedent is the mock epic *Tulifäntchen* written by Heine's friend, Karl Immermann, which shows the influence of Wieland, among others (Robertson 2009: 374). Hence, the internal literary tradition also had a significant effect (even though Heine was not particularly interested in Wieland's work, see Robertson 2009: 374, 379); at the same time, Ariosto's effect must also be considered (Robertson 2009: 379). Apart from heroi-comical poetry, *Atta Troll* is in several respects related to contemporary political poetry; this tendency is even more marked in the case of *Deutschland*, which was intended to be a companion piece of *Atta Troll*, although its tone is significantly more pessimistic (Robertson 2009: 382–395).

The analysis by Robertson (2009) is very important since it demonstrates that the mock epic was not a particular output of English (or Hungarian) literature, but it was a generally established genre in European literature that appeared in diverse forms.

Diversity also means that the mock epic proved quite adaptive; that is, the conventions of the mock epic never constituted a rigid system of requirements that would have excluded certain innovative features, as was the case for the classical (serious) epic. The mock epic is not only a literary response to the serious epic, but also a genre that was able to discuss the issues of contemporary literature and politics. Hence, the decisive question is what additional values the verse novel had that made it emerge alongside the mock epic on the one hand and raised it to the status of a separate genre on the other hand. Moreover, the mock epic was known in Hungarian literature as well, essentially in the same way as in other European literatures (cf. Kiss 1978), while the verse novel was far from being a necessary product of European literatures.

4.2 Csokonai's mock epics

As was pointed out by Kiss (1978), Csokonai has two works besides *Dorottya* [Dorottya] that belong to the mock epic tradition: *Az istenek osztozása* [The Contest of the Gods] and *Békaegérharc* [Battle of Frogs and Mice]. The overall significance of these is considerably lower than that of *Dorottya*, and the narrative structure of *Az istenek osztozása* is not particularly interesting either, especially regarding a potential similarity to verse novels. However, I consider it important to discuss *Békaegérharc* briefly, as this text shows certain properties which are compelling from a narratological perspective, and which are antecedents for similar features in *Dorottya* as well.

4.2.1 Csokonai following Blumauer

The immediate model of *Békaegérharc* [Battle of Frogs and Mice] for Csokonai was Blumauer's *Aeneis* (cf. Kiss 1978, Szauder 1980), as Csokonai indicates in the subtitle, too; recall from Robertson (2009) that Blumauer's text rewrites Virgil's original in a comical, parodistic form using rhymes, with a colloquial, sometimes even vulgar tone. Indeed, Csokonai adopted several features from Blumauer, including the form and the colloquial (possibly vulgar) tone (cf. Debreczeni 1998: 104); this naturally had its antecedents in contemporary popular (Hungarian) poetry (see Küllős 2007: 243–244). Regarding the exact nature of parody at hand, it must be stressed that *Békaegérharc* does not rely on a single original epic to be parodied, in which case the additional meaning of the original would constantly have an effect on the literal meaning of the parody. On the contrary, in *Békaegérharc* a far more general relation to the epic tradition can be observed, which also implies that there are no pre-given limitations concerning the

plot. The most direct specific connection of *Békaegérharc* is thus rather towards certain contemporary events, largely political in nature, especially in cantos II and III (note that Csokonai terms cantos “pipe tobaccos” in this work); as a result, all parodistic features had a reference to current politics for the contemporary reader.

However, an even more important difference from Blumauer’s parody is the foregrounding of the narrator in Csokonai’s work, which does not hold for the entire text but it is especially striking at the very beginning. There are already some reflections on the nature of the text in the Preface (“*Előbeszéd*”), which was written later than the rest, and which seeks to defend itself from a potential rejection on the reader’s part; the associated immediacy of the narrator is even stronger at the beginning of the first canto (“pipe tobacco”):

> Míg elkezdeném Énekem’
>   Instálom a’ Múzsámat,
> Pindusi dohánnyal Nekem
>   Tőltse meg a’ Pípámat,
> Hogy kezdhessek Énekembe,
> Mellyet minap’ hevertembe’
>   Firkáltam a’ térdemen.
>
> *Before I start my song,*
>   *I order my muse*
> *To stuff my pipe*
>   *With tobacco from Pindus,*
> *So that I can start my song,*
> *Which I wrote the other day*
>   *On my knee while lying.*
>
> (Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, *Békaegérharc*, Felfohászkodás [Invocation])

The deformation of epic conventions can be observed in the subsequent parts of the text, too. In fact, the gesture of ordering the muse down is known from the popular poetry of the period, and is thematised by Csokonai in his play *A méla Tempefői* [The Dreamy Tempefői] in the character of Csikorgó (lit. ‘Creaking’), a poet of minor qualities (act III, scene 7). Note that in the above quotation the muse is not set in a mythological context: the focus is not on her but on the narrator, who needs the muse only to carry out a minor task; that is, the stuffing of his pipe so that he can recite his song. Further, the muse is supposed to help the poet merely in reciting, not even in writing, since the song has already been written. Moreover, the narrator

refers to the (now completed) writing process as a spontaneous gesture: this, together with the immediacy of his tone, considerably resembles the narratological properties of the verse novel discussed earlier (see chapters 2 and 3).

Except for the beginning of the text, there are few references to the narrator's person in *Békaegérharc*, and most of these remarks can be interpreted as referring to the shared national identity between the narrator and the reader, since the narrator keeps referring to the general (political, cultural) situation rather than to his own self. The two are naturally intertwined to some extent, as is evident from the last stanza, in which the narrator refers back to the opening gesture of smoking tobacco, thereby quasi putting the narrated story into the frame of a story about writing and reciting.

Colloquial presentation may involve addressing the reader: this is exemplified by the closing remarks of "pipe tobacco" III after the mouse called Magrág (lit. 'Seed-Chew') is shot, and prompts the reader to avoid similar incidents by taking the necessary precautions. Regarding dialogues with the reader, the notes added to the (main) text should be mentioned: just like the preface, these were written later, and since the notes written by Csokonai only survived in his manuscripts, the edition containing them (1816) most probably includes notes written by the editor József Márton as well. The vast majority of the notes can be regarded as mere explanations of certain words, and hence they are not particularly interesting from a narratological perspective. However, there are two exceptions; the first one is the note to the word *serbedli* 'chamber pot':

> Serbedli, serbli, a' Magyarnak nints, és így neve sints. Hagyjuk meg hát serblinek ezt az éjjeli edényt.
>
> *Serbedli, serbli, Hungarians do not have it, hence it has no name. Let us just leave this chamber pot as "serbli".*
>
> (Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, *Békaegérharc*, footnote to pipe tobacco II, stanza 39)

The explanatory force of the footnote is highly questionable, at least compared to the other notes, and the playful, ironic tone distances the reader from the events of the main text much more than a (longer) word explanation.

The other relevant footnote shows an actual dialogue with the reader; the excuse for this is a statement by Jupiter appearing in the text, according to which only mice reside in the temple of Pallas in Hungary:

> „A' mit itt a' Jupiter szájjából hallunk, meg ne ütközz rajta Jámbor Magyar Olvasó. Azt mondhatja ő, az ő egében a' mit akar – – az ő szemei már igen

elgyengülvén ujságot is alig olvas, nem hogy egyebet. Az illyeneket kéttségkivűl a' nagyobb Assemblékba' hallja külföldön: – – ott is elég Jupiterek 's Merkuriuskák vannak, a' kik Hazánkról és Nemzetünkről így gondolkoznak. De engedjük meg ezeknek is ezt a' kis járatlanságot, a' világ egy illyen kis eldugott Kanahánjába', nints annak egyéb oka, hanem hogy mi minden afféLének, a' mi Honnyunkban történik, mindjárt dobot üttetni nem szeretünk; még távolabb vagyunk pedig attól, hogy azzal, a' mit magunkról és másokról tudunk, úgy kereskedni és kedveskedni szeretnénk, mint a' Tokaji 's több más borainkkal."

Do not stumble at what we hear from Jupiter here, gentle Hungarian reader. He can say whatever he wants to in his heaven – his eyes having deteriorated, he rarely reads newspapers, let alone other things. He undoubtedly hears such opinions at greater assemblies abroad – there are enough Jupiters and little Mercuries there as well, who think of our homeland and our nation in such a way. But let us allow these latter to be a little ignorant, too, regarding such a hidden little Canaan of the world, there is no other reason behind this than that we do not like to start beating the drum whenever something happens in our country; and we are even less inclined to trade and please others with what we know about us and others like we do with our Tokaj and many other wines.

(Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, *Békaegérharc*, footnote to pipe tobacco III, stanza 45)

At the same time, it should be kept in mind that the footnote quoted above survived only in a letter written by Csokonai; hence, it was not included in the 1816 edition by Márton. However, this question is essentially not relevant for examining what options Csokonai deemed possible for a literary work. On the other hand, this part of the text undoubtedly remained "invisible" for the subsequent literary tradition and could obviously not serve as a model.

4.2.2 The first Hungarian mock epic

The ironic comments of the author and his digressions attested in the footnotes are quite similar to what can be observed in Byron's *Childe Harold* (see the relevant section in Chapter 3). Moreover, this option is not restricted to Csokonai's *Békaegérharc* [Battle of Frogs and Mice]: it can be observed extensively in his *Dorottya* [Dorottya] as well. Regarding *Dorottya*, the influence of Pope and especially of *The Rape of the Lock* is well known (cf. Kiss 1978), as indicated by Csokonai in his preface (alongside his reference to the mock epics of Tasso and Boileau). Yet it must be stressed that Pope's work is a

significant generic antecedent rather than a pretext merely rewritten and modified by *Dorottya*. When discussing the fundamental differences between the two works, Petrőczi (2007: 144–150) highlights the differences in terms of tone in that Csokonai's text is undoubtedly closer to everyday, colloquial discourse, and in this sense Csokonai transcends his master. Of course, this is in the tradition of popular poetry as well, see Küllős (2007: 243, 251) and Gintli and Schein (2003: 415); regarding the relationship between the two works, see also the analysis by Kiss (1978) summarised in section 4.1, and some classical analyses such as Julow (1975) and Versényi (1898). Furthermore, the difference between Csokonai and Pope is important also because Csokonai's works are more similar to the verse novel in this respect; hence, treating Csokonai as a potential generic antecedent is definitely well-founded.

The generic status of *Dorottya* was, in fact, an important question already for Csokonai. In 1803, he wrote a preface (actually, prefaces) to the text he had written earlier, in which he partly establishes the dialogical relation to the reader (which will be continued in the actual text), stresses the fictitious nature of the text and explicitly discusses the status of his work (cf. Onder 2003: 194–199). According to Csokonai, the rather lengthy (though admittedly entertaining) authorial introduction is necessary (also) because the work in question "is the first one of its kind written in Hungarian", and as he later highlights by way of a fictitious dialogue between author and reader, the genre is essentially unknown. In fact, Csokonai termed his work "*furcsa vitézi versezet*", literally 'strange/comical heroic poem', and explains the designation right after the dialogue. The term "*vitézi versezet*" ('heroic poem') equals heroic poetry in general and the epic in particular; the word "*furcsa*" (present-day Hungarian 'strange') is used by Csokonai in the sense of 'comical' (cf. the German word *komisch*, which means both 'comical' and 'strange'). Hence, *Dorottya* is essentially a comical epic or mock epic (just like Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*), the genre being, according to Csokonai, a scarce commodity in Hungarian literature, at least concerning original texts written in the genre and not translations.

At the same time, the word "furcsa" taken in the sense of 'strange' appears to refer to the strangeness and distinctiveness of versification; according to Csokonai, the primary source of a comic effect lies in presenting "the story, which is in itself ridiculous", as "a feat and important event". Not surprisingly, Csokonai adjusts the form of the heroi-comical poem to the popular register, saying that if he "had intended to write a heroic poem", he "would have chosen the hexameter", but he deemed "the usual couplets" to be more suitable "for such a popular and merely entertaining epic". This formal deviation, as shown in section 1 of this chapter, is not a necessary property of the mock epic, and the relevant step of doing so makes the text in many respects similar to the verse novel.

Regarding the actual narrative structure, the narrator of *Dorottya* is foregrounded, even though this is somewhat uneven throughout the text. The use of the first person singular is not exceptional in the proposition and in the invocation of an epic (including the mock epic), and Csokonai's text here does not significantly deviate from the traditional patterns, except that it becomes somewhat more personal at certain points, as in the following passage from the proposition:

> Olly lármát, zendűlést, viadalt beszéllek,
> A' millyet nem láttam miolta tsak élek,
> A' millyet nem említ semmi Istória,
> Meg nem merne tenni maga a' Frantzia:
> Miként insurgála Amazon' módjára
> Egy nagy Dáma-tábor Carnevál' hadára.
>
> *I will speak of such clamour, riot and fight*
> *That I have not seen elsewhere ever since I was born,*
> *That is not mentioned in any history book,*
> *That not even the French would dare do:*
> *How a great lady-camp, like Amazons,*
> *Rebelled against the troops of Carnival.*
>
> (Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, *Dorottya*, Book I, lines 5–10)

From the reader's perspective, only the second simile (in the third line of the quotation) serves as an actual reference point. The story to be narrated/read can be compared to the way stories were recorded previously, and the further two intended reference points (what the French would dare do and especially what the narrator has seen so far) are considerably weaker, more subjective and difficult to check. The figure of the author-narrator becomes even more emphatic in the invocation:

> Fársángi jó borral habzó BUTELLIA!
> Mellytől a' Múzsákban gyúl a' fantázia,
> Te tőlts bé engemet élő Spiritussal,
> Hadd danoljak hartzot én is Enniussal.
> És te, NANÉT! tőllem szívességgel vedd el,
> Ha munkámnak betset szerzek szép neveddel:
> Legalább, ha könyvem' végig nem olvasod,
> Megpróbálhat'd rajta frizérozó-vasod.

BOTTLE, foaming with good carnival wine!
Which inflames imagination in the Muses,
Fill me with living Spirit,
Let me sing of war with Ennius,
And you, NANÉT! please take it kindly from me
If I make my work worthy by using your beautiful name:
At least, if you do not read it to the end,
You can test your hair iron on it.

(Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, *Dorottya*, Book I, lines 17–24)

It is evident that the conventions of the epic are parodied here (and reinterpreted in a peculiar way): the increase in the narrator's competence is attributed not to the muse but to alcohol, hence addressing the muse becomes superfluous. Regarding the dedication to Nanét, this presupposes a personal dialogue between the narrator and one of his readers, which makes the generally applicable role of the epic poet personal, and a shift from genericity to specificity occurs. Moreover, addressing Nanét this way also affects the person of Nanét, since the narrator's ironic remark concerning hair irons does not in the least serve to abstract away from the specific person. Similar discourse with the readers (possibly involving the addressing of specific people) can be observed in verse novels, as was shown in Chapters 2 and 3 in detail.

The narrator's person, just like in *Békaegérharc*, does not remain emphatic to the same extent in the entire text; however, similar gestures occur from time to time, involving a second start of narration (immediately before describing the march of Carnival), which essentially refers to the convention of invocation (just as the beginning of the catalogue in Book III). There is a well-known scene likewise belonging to the phenomenon of foregrounding the narrator in which the poet is travelling on the back of the Pegasus because the ladies were unwilling to take him into their sledge; the corresponding description sheds light upon his personal concerns:

Óh miket láttam én! óh miket tsudáltam!
Kivált sok Trompőzbe ha lekukutskáltam.

Oh, what I saw! oh, what I admired!
Especially when I peeped into many a trompeuse.

(Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, *Dorottya*, Book I, lines 100–101)

At the same time, it is evident that the narrator is identified as a participant of the event at the beginning of the text, and his incidental remarks are able to subjectivise

narration in each case, especially because the narrator consistently applies the first person singular. One such example is his argumentation concerning Hungarian dances in Book II (cf. Debreczeni 1998: 142–143). It should be mentioned that there are several reflections on Hungarian culture and its considerable deficiencies in *Békaegérharc*, just as the discussion of similar national issues is characteristic of the Hungarian verse novel, too. Many relevant examples can be found in László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages] and in Pál Gyulai's *Romhányi* [Romhányi].

Moreover, the narrator is not only a participant of the events but also the person recording them, as he points out several times (see for instance the closing scene, in which he stresses that he has actually seen everything he has written down). Still, he admits that he does not know everything nor can he write everything down, as he mentions in connection with the battles in Book III – there are similar discussions of what a narrator is licensed to do in Canto II of János Vajda's *Találkozások* [Encounters], as was pointed out in Chapter 2.

The reflections and remarks of the narrator are significant and more markedly present than in the case of *Békaegérharc*; in addition, Csokonai uses footnotes in *Dorottya* as well, even in a functionally more extensive way than in the case of the earlier *Békaegérharc*. Among others, they play a role in alienating the reader from the story, as was shown by Imre (1990: 63). Footnotes naturally include word explanations, although they are more elaborated than to be regarded as mere translations. In addition, several footnotes (also) express a personal opinion, as in the case of hair irons:

> A FRIZÉROZÓ VASAT, mint sok olvasó nálam is jobbann tudja, elébb holmi hánytt vetett papiroson próbálják meg, hogy nem éget é nagyon? Ez is elég szerentséje sok Verses könyvnek. –
>
> *HAIR IRONS, as many readers know much better than I do, are first tested on some trashy piece of paper, to see whether it would burn too much? This is the sad fate of many books of poems as well.*
>
> (Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, *Dorottya*, footnote to Book I, line 24)

The irony of the dedication in the text (Book I, lines 17–24, see above) is thus further highlighted by the footnote, which at the same time alienates the reader from the main text and essentially becomes an instance of digression from an essentially digressive point. This crucially resembles the unbounded way of narration observed in verse novels, as pointed out earlier. Similar examples can be observed in the explanations of the words "*trompőz*" 'trompeuse, false dress (intended to make the female bosom look bigger)' in Book I, line 101, and "*Springer*" 'knight (in chess)' in Book

II, line 80 – in the first case, the narrator reflects on the phenomenon, while in the second case, he reflects on the linguistic designation. Csokonai dedicates one of the most extensive footnotes to Hungarian dances (Book II, line 146), continuing a line of thought in the footnote that was digressive in the main text as well, just like in the case of hair irons discussed above.

In certain cases, footnotes provide the possibility of a relatively direct communication with the reader; this can be observed in the explanation of "the chains from Augsburg" (Hungarian "*augsburgi láncok*"), where the main text contains the following description (of Dorottya's sacrifice):

> Ekkor, mint meg-annyi áldozó-marhákat,
> Kiválaszt száz derék fekete balhákat;
> Augspurgi lántzokkal öszvepórászolja.
> 'S áldozó tüzére mindnyáját feltolja.
>
> *And then, as cattle to be sacrificed,*
> *She chooses one hundred brave black fleas;*
> *She binds them with chains from Augsburg.*
> *And pushes them onto her fire of sacrifice.*
>
> (Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, *Dorottya*, Book II, lines 400–403)

The footnote provides the following explanation:

> AUGSPURGI LÁNTZOK. – Ollyan finom apró lántzotskát tsinálnak az Augspurgi Mesteremberek, hogy azzal a' balha' lábát is megköthetni, 's ha a' balha ugrik, utánna rándúl. – Az árra egy lántzotskának tsak 15 kr.
>
> *CHAINS FROM AUGSBURG. – The masters from Augsburg make such fine, tiny chains that one could bind the leg of a flea with them, and if the flea jumps, the chain twitches with it. – Such a tiny chain costs only 15 Kreuzer.*
>
> (Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, *Dorottya*, footnote to Book II, line 402)

The footnote unquestionably explains the line of thoughts expressed in the main text; that is, why it is crucial that the chains be made in Augsburg, and how it is possible to put such chains on fleas. The idea is witty within the fictitious story as well; yet it does not markedly differ from the context there. By contrast, its veridicality is questioned by the footnote: on the one hand merely because the borderline

between reality and fiction is drawn elsewhere in the footnote than in the main text, and on the other hand because the idea is not presented as a direct statement but as part of a comparison. Moreover, it constitutes the standard value of comparison: the reference value is that the chains are "fine, tiny", which is a veridical statement. However, the exact degree of this property is carried by the clause "that one could bind the leg of a flea with them" is not veridical: it expresses a possible, hypothetical degree but does not specify whether this degree is realisable as well. All this contributes to the comic effect, just as the fact that the narrator informs the reader about the price of the product at the end of the explanation. In this way, he establishes a certain contact with the reader in the world external to the text as well, since he has experience concerning the price of the chains, and the reader may be interested in buying such chains.

Digressions in the footnotes can be entirely subjective as well; for instance, in Book IV, a dog called Pámpám is mentioned, and the following footnote is inserted:

> PÁMPÁM nevű Pudlija volt Somogyban egy Uraságnak, kinek Házánál esmeretségben voltam. Furtsa Kutya volt!
> *Fies nobilium tu quoque* PUDLIUM,
> *Me dicente*. – – – HORAT.[17]
>
> *PÁMPÁM was the name of the poodle owned by a gentleman in Somogy, whose family I was acquainted with. It was a strange dog!*
> Fies nobilium tu quoque *PUDLIUM,*
> Me dicente. – – – *HORAT.*
>
> (Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, *Dorottya*, footnote to Book IV, line 225)

The footnote is not exactly relevant in terms of reading the story, and it constitutes an alienating gesture similar to (and even stronger than) the ones in *Childe Harold*, as shown in Chapter 3. It is part of the game with the reader that while the narrator mentions that the dog in question was strange, he does not specify why the dog counts as strange. Hence, readers unfamiliar with the dog will remain agnostic in this respect; consequently, the gesture can be considered rather as an attempt at preserving the dog (or at least its name) for posterity.

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17 Note that the Latin quote attributed to Horace is a paraphrase of Horace's original (Ode 3.13), the last stanza of which starts as "*Fies nobilium tu quoque fontium /me dicente (…)*", meaning 'you will become of noble springs, / with me saying (…)'. Csokonai exchanged the word *fontium* 'fountain' for "*pudlium*", a mock-Latinised version meaning 'poodle', a change fully understandable for his contemporary readers.

The text of a footnote can thus enter a peculiar discourse with the main text; the most entertaining example of this kind is when Dorottya intends to bequeath some money to the narrating poet, saying:

> Továbbá, ha ama Kőltő jó kedvébe,
> A' ki most itt múlat ebb' a' Vármegyébe,
> Leírná a' Dámák mellett tett hartzomat,
> 'S hattyúi szárnyain zengné halálomat,
> Minthogy, a' mint mondják, eddig minden Nagyok
> Üressen botsáták: – néki fundust hagyok.
>
> *Furthermore, if that poet, who is now*
> *Having his amusement in this county, in his good spirits*
> *Described my fight for the ladies,*
> *And sang about my death on his swan wings,*
> *Since, as they say, so far all of the great dignities*
> *Have released him unpaid: – I will leave him some inheritance.*
>
> (Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, *Dorottya*, Book IV, lines 78–83)

In the footnote, however, the poet contests with this statement of Dorottya:

> EDDIG MINDEN NAGYOK ÜRESSEN BOTSÁTÁK. – Ha mások ezt mondják, nem jól mondják: mert p. o. *N. Mélt. Gr. SZÉCSÉNYI FERENTZ Ő Exc-ja* egy Presentben is 100 Rf. a' GRÓFNÉ *Ő Exc-ja* egy Ódámért külön 50 Rf. *Mélt. Gróf FESTETITS GYÖRGY Ő Nga*, a' hadi Oskoláról írott Ódámért 100 Rf. más ízben 25 Rf. ismét 30 Rf. ismét 40 Rf. *Mélt. Gróf ERDŐDY ZSIGMONDNÉ Ő Nga*. 5 vagy 6 sor versemért 12 aranyat, *T. N. FRATER ISTVÁN* Úr 50 Rf. adtak, hogy most másokat ne említsek. Méltatlan panasz az, hogy Nemzetünkben Metzénások nintsenek; vagynak igen is, tsak az Íróink vagy importunusok ne légyenek, vagy sordidusok. – *Principibus placuisse viris, non ultima laus est*. HORAT.
>
> *SO FAR ALL OF THE GREAT DIGNITIES HAVE RELEASED HIM UNPAID. – If others say so, they do so incorrectly: since, e.g.,* His Excellence the Noble and Honourable Count Ferentz Szécsényi *gave me just on one occasion 100 ells [of cloth],* Her Excellence *the Countess gave me another 50 ells for one of my odes*. His Lordship the Honourable Count György Festetits *paid me 100 ell for my ode on the military*

> *school, at other occasions he gave me 25 ells, and 30 ells, and 40 ells.* Her Ladyship the Honourable Countess Zsigmondné Erdődy *paid me 12 golds for 5 or 6 lines of verse of mine,* the Noble and Honourable Mr István Frater *paid me 50 ells, not to mention others here now. It is an unworthy complaint that there are no patrons in our nation: there are indeed, and I wish our writers were either not importune or sordid.* – Principibus placuisse viris, non ultima laus est. *HORACE.*
>
> (Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, *Dorottya*, footnote to Book IV, line 83)

The poet's concerns are clearly foregrounded here, namely at Dorottya's expense, who actually seems to be dying at the given point of the story; alienation from the story in this case involves the activation of the interplay between the various levels of the text, and the structure becomes even more complex by referring to the biographical author. Such examples, as pointed out in Chapters 2 and 3, are significant in verse novels, especially in the case of Byron and Pushkin; the beginning of Canto II of János Arany's *Bolond Istók* [Stephen the Fool] can also be mentioned.

Regarding narrative structure, it can be concluded that Csokonai's mock epics, especially *Dorottya* can be regarded as antecedents of the Hungarian verse novel in several respects, and essentially everything serving as antecedents in Pope's works and in *Childe Harold* for *Don Juan* can be found in Csokonai's work as well. That is, only by considering Csokonai's example, it should be obvious that the Hungarian verse novel had significant antecedents in the Hungarian literary tradition alongside the relevant foreign examples.

4.3 Petőfi's mock epic

As is clear from Kiss (1978), Csokonai's influence on the mock epic can primarily be detected in Sándor Petőfi's *A helység kalapácsa* [The Hammer of the Village]. In this section, I will investigate whether *A helység kalapácsa* shows narrative features that can be observed either later in verse novels or previously in Csokonai's mock epics.

The beginning of the text presents a foregrounded narrator:

> Szeretnek az istenek engem,
> Rémítő módra szeretnek:
> Megajándékoztanak ők
> Olly ritka tüdővel,
> Melly a csatavészek

Világrendítő dúlakodásit
Illendőn elkurjantani képes,
S mellyet tőlem minden kántor irígyel.
És hogy férfi legyen,
Méltó e tüdőhöz,
Lön az égi hatalmak irántami hajlandóságából
A széles tenyerű Fejenagy,
A helységi kovács,
Vagy mint őt a dús képzeletű nép
Költőileg elnevezé:
A helység kalapácsa. –

Gods love me,
They terribly do:
They have bestowed upon me
Such rare lungs
That can appropriately yell
The word-shattering scrums
Of battles,
And all cantors envy me for this.
And to have a hero
Worthy of these lungs,
The wide-palmed Fejenagy
Was born, due to the love of the heavenly powers towards me,
Fejenagy, the village smith,
Or, as he was poetically named
By the highly imaginative folk:
The hammer of the village. –

(Sándor Petőfi, *A helység kalapácsa*, Canto I, lines 1–16)

The narrator is dominant already in his first utterance, since, contrary to the epic tradition, he does not present himself as subordinate to the muses but rather stresses his talents (that others do not have). Yet his dominance does not involve a truly personal appearance: he is exclusively present as a poet, and his speech is not given in any specific context. His dominance is evident in his relation to the hero, Fejenagy (lit. 'Big-Headed') as well since the hero must be worthy of the narrator, and not vice versa: this is similar to what can be observed in Byron's *Don Juan* (see Chapter 3).

The distinguished role of the poet is (self-)ironic already at the beginning of the text; an even more straightforward example can be found in the following part of Canto III:

Oh te piros nap!
Mért vagy te piros?
Szégyen-e vagy harag az,
Mi arany súgáraidat
Megrezesíti,
Mint a bor az emberek orrát?
Nem szégyen, de nem is harag az,
Csak én tudom ennek okát,
Én, kit földöntúli izék
Földöntúli izékbe avattak.

Oh, you red sun!
Why are you red?
Is it shame or anger
That reddens
Your golden rays,
As wine does the noses of people?
It is neither shame nor anger,
Only I know the reason for this,
I, whom transcendent thingies
Have initiated into transcendent thingies.

(Sándor Petőfi, *A helység kalapácsa*, Canto III, lines 39–48)

A reference is made to a possible, typical self-presentation of the Romantic poet; at the same time, the designation "*transcendent thingies*" (Hungarian: "*földöntúli izék*") deconstructs the seriousness of the statement, thereby making the evoked tradition the object of parody as well. This is naturally in line with the way mock epics relate to literary conventions.

Communication with the reader is on a mostly general level; at the beginning of his work, the narrator addresses his audience in the following way:

Ti, kik erős lélekkel birván
Meg nem szeppentek a harci morajtól,
Halljátok szavamat!

De ti, a kiknek szíve
Keményebb dolgoknál
A test alsó részébe hanyatlik,
Oh ti kerűljétek szavamat!

You, who, having strong souls,
Are not intimidated by the roar of battles,
Listen to my words!
But you, whose hearts
Sink to the lower part of the body
When hearing tougher matters,
Oh, avoid my words!

(Sándor Petőfi, *A helység kalapácsa*, Canto I, lines 17–23)

However, this remark addresses an audience as general as possible, contributing to the humorous effect since the size of the audience hypothesised by the text is considerably greater than what the proposed topic is expected to have.

Similar examples of extending the audience can be observed later as well. For instance, in Canto I, Fejenagy is locked in the church, and he discovers the optimal solution after a long period of thinking. His discovery is announced in the text as a direct quote: "*Megvan!*" ('I've got it!'), which is followed by these lines:

S a kiváncsi világ azt kérdi: mi van meg?
Hegyezd füledet,
Kiváncsi világ!
Lantom neked elzengendi: mi van meg.

And the curious world asks: what is it?
Prick up your ears,
Curious world!
My lute will tell you: what it is.

(Sándor Petőfi, *A helység kalapácsa*, Canto I, lines 152–155)

In this case, the text indicates a maximally general audience (the world), which is in sharp contrast with the particularity of the given question. Compared to this general audience, the poet is personal only to the extent that he has a distinguished position; however, he still appears exclusively in his role as a poet, with the relevant traditional attribute of the lute, and not as a person who is of interest beyond his function

as a poet. Similar occurrences can also be found at other points of the text (see, for example, Canto II, lines 16–17).

Dividing the text into cantos is an important question for the narrator of *A helység kalapácsa*, and the division can be reflected on in the text, just like in verse novels; division is represented as a pause in the process of narration and reading, as at the ending of Canto I:

Mig a bölcs férfiu tervét,
Leleményes eszének
Fényes tanuját,
Teljesülés koronázza:
Pihennénk tán egyet – aztán
Uj erővel
Térjünk a tettek más mezejére.

Till the plan of the wise man,
The shining proof
Of his ingenuity
Is crowned by fulfilment:
We should probably take a rest – and then
With new strength
Let us turn to different actions.

(Sándor Petőfi, *A helység kalapácsa*, Canto I, lines 178–184)

However, the necessity of taking a rest (which affects not only the reader but also the audience) cannot be regarded as an arbitrary gesture in the same way as was observed in Byron's work, and is not as sharp as it usually is in verse novels. In this respect, it rather resembles Scott's minstrel (see the relevant section in Chapter 3). Moreover, the interruption of the story is not particularly strong either, since there is a natural caesura as well: the narrator makes it clear that Fejenagy will free himself, in this way closing the episode, and he also indicates that he is going to change topic (at least in part). Hence, there is no discrepancy between the story and the division of its narration.

These reflexive gestures primarily affect the diegetic level of the text; however, there are examples for reflections on the extradiegetic level as well. For instance, at the beginning of Canto II, the narrator mentions that according to several people, the redness of Mistress Erzsók's face is not due to chastity but to wine; the narrator reacts to this as follows:

De ezek csak pletyka beszédek;
Mert Erzsók asszony nem is issza a bort…
Csak ugy önti magába.
Illyen a rágalom aztán!
Oh ez előtt nincs
Szentség a föld hátán,
A legszűzebb ártatlanságnak
Tiszta vizét is
Bémocskolja iszappal,
A hóra sarat hány,
És… de hová ragadál?
Oh fölhevülésnek
Gyors talyigája!

But these are merely gossips;
For Mistress Erzsók does not drink wine…
She literally pours it into herself.
This is what calumny is like!
Oh, there is no
Sanctity for it on earth,
It smears
The clear water of
The purest innocence with sludge,
It throws mud upon snow,
And… but where have you taken me?
Oh, swift barrow
Of zeal!

(Sándor Petőfi, *A helység kalapácsa*, Canto II, lines 30–42)

On the one hand, the narrator ironically pretends to refute the accusations (while he actually confirms them), and, related to this, he digresses on the phenomenon of calumny. Finally, he suddenly interrupts this line of thoughts, recognising that he has been digressing from the actual story. This reflection on digression is similar to the case of verse novels; hence, reflections on the extradiegetic level are present in *A helység kalapácsa* as well, though restricted to a short gesture, which does not become truly emphatic.

The narrator, as mentioned above, is interesting primarily in his role as a poet; yet there are some examples for more personal manifestations, as at the end of Canto II:

S ezzel a helybeli lágyszivü kántor
Fölemelte s letette a kancsót;
Csak hogy mikoron fölemelte,
Csordultig vala az, –
És a midőn letevé,
Üres vala az,
Valamint üresek zsebeim
Most, mikor ezt éneklem
Nagy lelkesedéssel
Költői dühömben. –

Having said this, the local soft-hearted cantor
Raised and put down the carafe;
But when he raised it,
I was still full, –
And when he put it down,
It was empty,
As my pockets are empty
Now, when I am singing this
With great enthusiasm
In my poetic heat.

(Sándor Petőfi, *A helység kalapácsa*, Canto II, lines 366–375)

At this point, the narrator makes his situation part of a simile: the simile is surprising not only because it involves a thematically unusual association but also because the narrator provides a truly personal piece of information, unlike preceding parts of the text. However, this piece of information is presented in a highly ironic way, in line with the tone of the entire text; a similar gesture can be observed in Canto III, lines 14–19. Moreover, personal information here is restricted to a single statement of facts and does not tell more about the circumstances of narration or the life of the poet. In this sense, this kind of personal manifestation also rather involves the reminiscence of a certain role (and prototype) of the poet.

The reflection at the beginning of Canto III is not much different either:

Oh nagyon is jó szívü közönség,
Különösen ti,
Szép lyánykái hazámnak,
Kiket annyira szeretek én,

Hanem a kiktől
Nem nyerek egy makulányi szerelmet, –
Ha szépen kérlek benneteket:
Ugy-e nem fogtok haragudni reám,
Hogy a helybeli lágyszivü kántornak
Szerelemvallásától
S a tánc kellő közepéből
Drága figyelmeteket
A templom tájékára csigázom?

Oh, you audience with very kind hearts indeed,
Especially you,
Fair daughters of my homeland,
Whom I love so much,
From who, however,
I do not get a grain of love, –
If I ask you kindly:
Will you not be mad at me
That I will draw your dear attention
From the local tender-hearted cantor's
Declaration of love
And from the very middle of dancing
To the surroundings of the church?

(Sándor Petőfi, *A helység kalapácsa*, Canto III, lines 1–13)

The narrator is personal at this point in that he concentrates on a group that is close to his heart; yet he does not name any designated person(s) within this group, and his gesture is more an instance of communication with the reader than a truly personal utterance. Reducing the addressed public is well-grounded since this particular group is viewed as especially sensitive to the topic change announced by the narrator, and the poet who is hopelessly in love is likewise a traditional motif.

In line with the entire text, the ending of the work, just like the opening, does not contain reflections of the kind attested in verse novels: importantly, there is some reflexion in either case, but the narrator speaks primarily as a poet and evokes traditional attributes of the poetic profession, though of course in a highly ironic form:

Te pedig, lantomnak húrja, pihenj!
Nagy volt a munka, s bevégzéd
Emberül e munkát.

Én is pihenek
Babéraimon,
Miket a hírnek mezején
Borzas főmre kaszáltam.

And you, strings of my lute, take a rest!
The work was great, and you have
Accomplished this task manly.

I, too, will rest
On my laurels
That I have scythed on the field of fame
Onto my unkempt head.

(Sándor Petőfi, *A helység kalapácsa*, Canto IV, lines 213–219)

Irony is increased by the fact that the narrator compares the laurels of immortality to Marci Zöld, a Hungarian outlaw hanged in 1816:

Eljő az irígység
Letépni babéraimat… de hiába!
Nem fogja elérni;
Magasan függendnek azok,
Mint Zöld Marci.

Envy will come
To rip off my laurels… but in vain!
It will not reach them;
They will be hanging high,
Like Marci Zöld.

(Sándor Petőfi, *A helység kalapácsa*, Canto IV, lines 230–234)

Again, the central topic is the validity of the traditional role of the poet and its ironic reinterpretation, and there is no significant change in terms of the complexity of

narrative structure: reflections are on the traditional role of the poet and its relation to the audience, which is likewise not new.

In this sense, while *A helység kalapácsa* indeed contains reflections from the narrator's part, these are not as frequent as in the case of Csokonai's *Dorottya* [Dorottya], and they are also less similar to the narrative properties of verse novels in terms of their quality. Hence, while *Dorottya* can definitely be regarded as a potential antecedent for the verse novel, *A helység kalapácsa* is rather merely a text which is related to the genre to some extent and which contributed to the embeddedness of the verse novel in Hungarian literary tradition; yet it was not incremental in its appearance due to its more restricted structure.

4.4 János Arany and the mock epic

In order to understand the relationship between the mock epic and the verse novel, it is essential to consider the relevant texts of János Arany, primarily because Arany wrote a verse novel as well. In this way, the differences between the two genres can be detected in the oeuvre of a single author, and, on the other hand, the differences between Arany's mock epics and preceding mock epics may describe the changes necessary for the establishment of a wider literary context which the verse novel was immediately built on. There are two texts to be discussed: *Az elveszett alkotmány* [The Lost Constitution] from 1845 and *A nagyidai cigányok* [The Gypsies of Nagyida] from 1851.

While the opening of *Bolond Istók* [Stephen the Fool] already focuses on the narrator's person and on his (partly arbitrary) choice regarding the hero, both *Az elveszett alkotmány* and *A nagyidai cigányok* strongly imitate the epic tradition in their respective openings, naturally treating the epic conventions ironically; the narrator's person is interpretable within this framework. The beginning of *Az elveszett alkotmány* recalls the proposition of a heroic topic:

> Férfiat énekelek, ki sokat s nagy-messze rikoltott,
> Sőt tett is valamit (kártyára kivált); ki hogy az volt
> Aminek énekelem, tudniillik *férfi*, mutatja
> Hátramaradt nagy kostöke, karcsú makrapipája,
> Melynek szűk fenekén némán gyászolja halálát
> Már élveztelenűl maradott legutóbbi bagója.
>
> *I sing of a man, who shouted a lot and to a long distance,*
> *Moreover, he also did something (like playing cards); and he was indeed*

What I claim him to be, that is, a man, *as shown by*
His huge tobacco pouch and his slender cutty pipe,
On the narrow bottom of which his last tobacco
He could not enjoy any more is lamenting his death.

(János Arany, *Az elveszett alkotmány*, Canto I, lines 1–6)

By contrast, the opening of *A nagyidai cigányok* primarily reflects on the tradition of invocation in a similarly ironic fashion:

Múzsa, te, ki nem jársz idres-bodros konttyal,
Vézna bőrödet sem fested bécsironggyal –
De piros, de pozsgás napégette arcod:
Te segíts, méltóan elzengnem e harcot!

Add rívó hegedű búgását dalomnak,
Cincegő zengésit húros cimbalomnak,
Klarinétok füttyét, dobok dobbanását,
Harsány trombitákkal összeroppanását.

Önts szájamba édes, hatalmas éneket,
Mellyel örökítsem választott népedet;
Míg a magyar nóta daliáit zengem:
Parlagok múzsája! cserbe' ne hagyj engem.

Muse, you, who do not walk around with a frizzy bun,
Neither do you colour your thin skin with blusher –
How red, how ruddy your sun-scorched face is:
You help me to sing about this battle worthily!

Give the buzz of the crying violin to my song,
The squeaking resonance of the stringed dulcimer,
The whistle of clarinets, the beat of drums,
Their breaking together with shrilling trumpets.

Pour into my mouth a sweet, mighty song,
With which I may immortalise your chosen people;
Till I sing about the heroes of Hungarian songs:
Muse of the fallows! do not leave me in the lurch.

(János Arany, *A nagyidai cigányok*, Canto I, lines 2–4)

The reference to epic traditions is less emphatic than in the case of *Bolond Istók*. However, the difference from Csokonai's *Dorottya* [Dorottya] is also significant, since *Dorottya* evokes both the tradition of proposition and of invocation, while in Arany's mock epics, the evocation of the conventional structure is partial only.

Just like in *Dorottya*, the narrator of *Az elveszett alkotmány* appears as a poet who witnesses the narrated events. This role is parodied in Arany's text as well in that the narrator interprets the requirement to write only what he sees literally, and in that he intends to convince the reader at all events that he is indeed doing so. This can be observed at the beginning of the story, too:

Est vala; szép nyárest: beh kár hogy nem jöve költő,
(Mert én, alkony után érkezvén, csak tapogattam)
Bájaiból élvet szívandó. Balga rüpők nép
Csak hétköznapinak nézé, sőt észre se vette.
Én sem irom le, mikép csusszant le az ég karimáján
A felséges nap, mivel ezt már annyi leírta
(És a nemes lelkű nap *tűrt* valamennyi leírást),
Hogy tengerbe vizet, megyegyűlésekbe tüzelni
Szalmát hordana csak, ki megint e térre vetődnék.
Annyit azonban egész bizonyossággal merek én is
Mondani, mert Trattner naptára tanúm e dologban,
Hogy hét órakor és ötven perckor nyugodott le
A ragyogó vándor, s akkor tölté ki robotját,
Mellyel szent *Norbert* részére adós vala, mint ezt
Szint' a naptárból láthatja, ki ért a betűkhöz.

It was evening; a beautiful summer evening: what a pity no poet came
(For I, having arrived after dusk, could only fumble my way)
To be inspired by its charms. The foolish yokels
Thought it was merely an everyday phenomenon, moreover, they did not notice it at all.
I will not describe either how the majestic sun slid down
On the rand of the sky, since it has been described by so many
(And the noble sun has tolerated *some description)*
That whoever intended to pursue the same quest
Would only be bringing water into the sea or hay into county meetings for igniting fire.
Yet, so much I can surely say, too,
Because Trattner's calendar is my witness in this respect,
That the shining wanderer set at seven fifty

And served his corvée then
With which he was indebted to Saint Norbert*, as can*
Be seen from the same calendar, if one knows the letters.

(János Arany, *Az elveszett alkotmány*, Canto I, lines 24–38)

According to this, the narrator is bound in the sense that he can only write down what he has actually seen (which is rather to be interpreted as a parody of an existing narratological tradition); on the other hand, literary tradition likewise appears as a sort of boundary inasmuch as the narrator tries to avoid using clichés. The way the relationship to literary tradition is presented and the fact that the text is explicitly claimed to be a written text are similar to what can be observed in verse novels than to what is characteristic of the main text of, for instance, *Dorottya*: Csokonai makes similar reflections only in the footnotes.

The requirement of verisimilitude is presented as part of a mock poetic creed (see, for example, lines 156–159), and this is particularly emphatic when the narrator presents Armída as a creature that has half of a face, only because this is what can actually be seen of her in the light of the candle:

Túl a világon (azaz, nem túl e *földi* világon,
Csak túl a mécsen, mellyet mondhatni világnak,
Mint a szabó hölgyét »nagysám«-nak), túl e világon
Sápadoz egy fél arc, – fele vagy nincs meg, vagy a mécsfény
Hozzá nem férhet (lessünk rá, majd kiviláglik);
A félarc közepén egy szem sandalgat a mécsre,
Egy kar alább… egy kéz… Örömest írnám le, de a mit
Nem látok, hogyan írjam az Isten drága kegyéért?!
Hisz nem azért vagyok én költő, hogy rendre hazudjam,
Mit soha nem láttam, sőt még említni se hallék.
Na, de szerencse hogy éjtszaka is *hall* a füles ember
(Boldogok a fülesek), máskép megakadna az ének
Torkomon, és egy szót sem tudnék mondani többet.[18]

[18] Note that the first four lines of the quotation contain an untranslatable pun: the Hungarian word *világ* means both 'world' and 'light' (regarding the latter meaning, the form is somewhat archaic in present-day Standard Hungarian, and the derivative form *világosság* 'light(ness)' would be used). Hence, the phrase in the first line *túl a világon* may mean both 'beyond the light' and 'beyond the world'.

Beyond all light (not beyond all the light of this world,
Just behind the candle, which can be called 'all light',
As a tailor may call his lady »madam«), beyond all this light,
There is a pale half-face, – half of it is either missing or the candle-light
Cannot show it (let us see, it will come to light);
In the middle of the half-face an eye is squinting onto the candle,
Below one arm… one hand… I would be pleased to describe, but what
I cannot see, how should I write about it, for God's sake?!
Indeed, I am not a poet to lie about
What I have never seen, nor have I heard mentioned.
Oh, but luckily one has ears and can hear *at night, too*
(Happy the ones who have ears), otherwise the song would get stuck
In my throat, and I would not be able to say even a word any more.

(János Arany, *Az elveszett alkotmány*, Canto I, lines 96–108)

Again, it is evident that the narrator sometimes directs his remarks towards the reader and makes certain formal properties of the text the primary topic. Apart from issues related to veridicality, this might affect the grammatical/stylistic properties of the text:

Hadd ballagjanak ők; nincs semmi közöm velök. Itt jő
– Tudniillik, képzeld kegyes olvasnok, hogy ahol jő –
(Úgy hiszem e *nok*-ot itt meg fogja bocsátni Nagy Ignác,
Kényszeritő szükség toldatta ki versemet ezzel)
Egy… tudom én mi? – Fején hosszú kalap, összelapúltan,
Melynek színvegye még nincs földön utánzva ecsettel;
Nagyszerü orra törekszik testét jó-tova hagyni,
A szárnyára kapott szél búgván *bősenyes* öblén;
Hosszu nyakán, amint födözetlenül ölti előre,
Szint' egy orr látszik: de nem orr (nem mondok olyasmit
Ami valótlanság), hanem ádámcsutka, barátim.[19]

[19] Lines 2 and 3 of the quotation contain an untranslatable pun/problem. Arany uses the word *olvasnok* 'reader', with the now unproductive deverbal nominalising suffix *-nok*, while the usual form would be *olvasó* 'reader', using the present participle suffix *-ó*, which can likewise derive nouns from verbs (essentially, the participle is used as a noun, similarly to the *-ing* in English). Note that there are surviving derivations of the form in present-day Hungarian, as in the split between *író* 'writer' and *írnok* 'scribe'. The purist Ignác Nagy mentioned in the text was against such derivations.

Let them go; I have nothing to do with them. Here comes
– For, imagine, kind bibliophile, there comes –
(I believe, this -phile *will be forgiven by Ignác Nagy here,*
Compelling need forced me to use it in my verse)
A… *what do I know what? – A hat on its head, collapsed,*
The mixture of its colours not imitated on earth by any brush;
Its gigantic nose tries to leave its body far behind,
The intensified wind buzzing in its vast *cavity;*
On its long neck, as it is pushed forward uncovered,
There seems to be another nose: but it is not a nose (I do not say anything
That is untrue) but an Adam's apple, my friends.

(János Arany, *Az elveszett alkotmány*, Canto I, lines 60–70)

The requirement of remaining faithful to the truth is ironic here as well. The description provided by the narrator is insufficient and partly incomprehensible for the reader; it strictly adheres to the narrator's self-declared rules that he would only write what he actually sees, and he does so even if what he sees does not combine into a coherent picture for himself either. In addition, the narrator discusses the linguistic properties of his text when he defends his choice regarding the word *olvasnok* 'reader', thereby referring to the constraints of versification as well. These gestures are again references to the literary and linguistic form of the text that are similar to what can be observed in verse novels, too, which are thus sporadically present already in *Az elveszett alkotmány* (see also, for instance, lines 77, 155, 177, 189–193, 329–341, 380–383).

References to the quality of versification and to the linguistic form of the text may interrupt the story, in which case they are not merely remarks; this is exemplified by the following excerpts, in which Hábor scolds his wife, Armída:

Vagy tán nem tudom én, hogy Q. megye legközelebbi
Tisztújításán vezetéd látatlan alakban
A maradó pártot; tüzeléd Rák Bende halandót
S a több cinkosokat, kik durva dorongot emeltek
A sebesen *haladás* szentséges zászlaja ellen?
Phúj......................................

Jegyzés. Ez a sor szebb volt a többi soroknál,
Mert kiki gondolhat vereset vagy zöldet alatta;
A garaboncásnak pedig adtunk untig időt, hogy
Fúja ki kénye szerint nagy méltóságu haragját.

Or don't I know that you led the staying party
In an invisible shape during the latest election
Of Q country; that you instigated the mortal Bence Rák
And the other accomplices, who raised a coarse pole
Against the sacred flag of swift progress?
Fie..

Note. *This line is more beautiful than the others,*
For everyone may imagine it as red or green;
And we have given enough time for the magician to
Release his majestic anger as it pleases him.

(János Arany, *Az elveszett alkotmány*, Canto I, lines 252–261)

Playing with the text affects multiple levels. First, the narrator ends the speech delivered in an elevated tone by inserting a markedly spoken-language element, and then, reflecting on this, he remarks that the readers may imagine whatever they wish, at the same time hinting at the onomatopoetic meaning of the string *phúj* (referring to the sound of the wind or to a person releasing air). Similar examples of playing with different styles and literary forms can be observed at other points of the text as well, though not as markedly (see, for instance, line 188).

Hence, it can be concluded that the main text of *Az elveszett alkotmány* contains several reflexive gestures, and as such it is closer to the verse novel than Csokonai's *Dorottya*. It must be mentioned that footnotes have an important role, too: just as in Csokonai's works, footnotes written by Arany often serve to explain something (such as a word or a reference made at a given point of the text), but they frequently contain humorous, reflexive remarks as well. For example, the following footnote intends to explain the meaning of the word *utolv* (an English equivalent would be *postciple*, see the relevant footnote below):

> *Utolv*: teszi azt, midőn valaki először megtesz valamit s azután gondolkozik rajta: mi okból cselekedte? Eset rá tömérdek, kivált honunkban. S minthogy ez eszme kifejezésére a latin nyelv is szűk: bátor vagyok egy új szót gyártani s azt a tudós világra rákötni: postcipium. A latin nyelv, mint haj, köröm stb., halál után is nő.[20]

[20] The word *utolv* is coined by Arany on the basis of the existing word *elv* 'principle', in which the first element *el-* means 'first, before' and *-v* is an unproductive nominalising suffix: Arany coined the opposite of 'principle' by changing the first element to *utol-* 'after'. The same is done to the existing Latin word *principium* 'principle' by changing *prin-* to its antonym *post-*. My translation above uses the same method to coin *postciple* based on *principle*.

> Postciple: *refers to an event when someone first does something and thinks about only afterwards: for what reason did he do it? There are plenty of such cases, especially in our country. And since not even the Latin language has a word for conveying this idea: I take the liberty to fabricate a new word and make it known to the learned world: postcipium. The Latin language, like hair, nails etc., continues to grow after death as well.*
>
> (János Arany, *Az elveszett alkotmány*, footnote to Canto I, line 346)

Just like in Csokonai's works, it is evident that the footnote digresses from actual word explanation, which is essentially given in the first sentence. Since the word is a coinage by Arany, it is expected that the entire explanation should be longer than merely providing the meaning of the word; yet the second sentence is unnecessary in the sense that it is only a subjective remark. In the third sentence, the narrator takes the language game a step further in that he creates the Latin version of his Hungarian coinage, making the origin of this coinage appear as a spontaneous gesture. The last sentence creates a wider conceptual framework for this gesture in the form of an aphorism, again to be understood as ironical.

Reflexivity is overall less characteristic of *A nagyidai cigányok*, and it appears mostly when the narrator refers to the limits of his competence as an author:

> De leírni őket vajh! ki győzné sorra?
> Dicsőségök nem fér a papirosomra:
> Nohát nem is bántom. – Lássuk már a gyűlést,
> Mivel Csóri vajda megnyitá az űlést.
>
> *But to describe them all! I wonder: who could cope with that?*
> *Their glory does not fit onto my piece of paper:*
> *So, I won't touch it at all. – Let us now see the gathering,*
> *As Voivode Csóri has opened the meeting.*
>
> (János Arany, *A nagyidai cigányok*, Canto I, stanza 41)

The narrator's gesture is especially ironic because the first two lines suggest that he wishes to provide further description, but the pathos of the corresponding line of thoughts is interrupted by his statement that suggests exactly the opposite. Most gestures that similarly address the finiteness of the narrator's competence are, however, less complex (see, for instance, Canto I, stanzas 24, 32, 78, 91, Canto II, stanzas 63–64).

The lack of knowledge from the author's part may result in some arbitrariness, such as in the case of naming one of the characters (Héring, lit. 'herring'):

Míg igy tanakodtak a mi bölcs vezérink,
Monda egy sovány ur (legyen neve Héring):
»Sok szónak sok alja: én találtam egyet:
Uraim, nem látják ezt a magas *hegyet*?«

While our wise chiefs were reasoning this way,
A thin gentleman (let his name be Héring) spoke:
»Too much talk, little accomplished: I've got an idea:
Gentlemen, don't you see this high mountain?«

(János Arany, *A nagyidai cigányok*, Canto II, stanza 19)

However, arbitrariness is by far not as strong as in the case of verse novels, where the choice of the hero is arbitrary on the narrator's part already.

Finally, it is important to mention that Canto II is closed with a gesture like in verse novels:

De hogy és mint készül a vitézlő sereg,
(Lévén már most annyi szép ruha, ló, nyereg),
És hogyan állá meg dicsően a sarat:
Ennek elmondása más énekre marad.

But how the brave army was preparing,
(Given that there were so many pretty clothes, horses, saddles)
And how they stood their ground:
This is left to be told by another canto.

(János Arany, *A nagyidai cigányok*, Canto II, stanza 101)

Interrupting the storytelling process in such a way, including the reflection on the written quality of the text, is known from verse novels: neither Csokonai nor Petőfi applied the topicalisation of internal structuring, as in their works closing and opening gestures are present exclusively at the very end and beginning of the entire text. Note that the ending of Canto II of *A nagyidai cigányok* ultimately corresponds to the ending of the entire text: however, the given point claims itself to be internal, as it refers to the possibility of continuation, and János Arany indeed intended to do so. Contrary to verse novels, however, this gesture cannot be regarded as part of a consistent narrative structure, as there are no similar reflections regarding editing the text.

In sum, *A nagyidai cigányok* is less similar to the verse novel than *Az elveszett alkotmány*, since the main text contains considerably fewer reflections, and footnotes (which may contain reflections in addition) are entirely absent. At the same time, reflexivity is markedly different even in *Az elveszett alkotmány* from the patterns observed in verse novels: the narrator steps forward only to a very limited degree and remains essentially anonymous even through his reflections; hence, he is not as dominant as the narrators of verse novels. In this sense, there appears to be a straightforward generic difference between János Arany's mock epics and his *Bolond Istók* (as well as other prototypical verse novels, of course); on the other hand, by comparing Arany's mock epics to those of Csokonai and Petőfi, it is clear that Arany's works differ from previous mock epics in such a way that they are indeed more closely related to the verse novel.

4.5 The Hungarian mock epic as a literary antecedent

The discussion above shows that the Hungarian mock epic was fairly close to the verse novel; therefore, the chief questions are to what extent this similarity was able to have influence, and why the Hungarian verse novel came to be established only in the 1870s and primarily based on international examples, yet, as opposed to these, why it was manifest as a genre.

From the texts examined here, János Arany's works, especially *Az elveszett alkotmány* [The Lost Constitution], are structurally the closest to the narrative structure of the verse novel, while the least similar is Sándor Petőfi's *A helység kalapácsa* [The Hammer of the Village]; however, it is rather Mihály Csokonai Vitéz's *Dorottya* [Dorottya] that can be regarded as a potential generic antecedent. As already pointed out in section 4.3, *A helység kalapácsa* does not show an inherent relatedness to the narrative structure of the verse novels, and hence belongs to the texts that, to a significant degree, contributed to the embeddedness of the verse novel within the Hungarian literary context, even though the verse novel appeared independently of them. At the same time, Arany's mock epics cannot be regarded as true antecedents, as both texts in question appeared approximately at the same time as Canto I of his *Bolond Istók* [Stephen the Fool], which was published in 1850: *Az elveszett alkotmány* stems from a few years before, and *A nagyidai cigányok* [The Gypsies of Nagyida] came later. Moreover, the narrative properties of Arany's mock epics are most probably not independent of the literary impact that was instrumental in the appearance of his verse novel *Bolond Istók*. Finally, the Hungarian verse novel is attested as a

genre only in the 1870s, which is in line with the assumption that the real breakthrough in terms of the Hungarian verse novel was the 1866 translation of *Eugene Onegin* by Károly Bérczy (see Imre 1990: 40–41).

The picture is further complicated by the fact that the missing prerequisite for the Hungarian verse novels was not even just the availability of foreign examples, as Byron was known already in the 1820s and 1830s in Hungary: *Childe Harold* was highly popular, although its influence is evident primarily in lyric poetry (Imre 1990: 16–17). János Arany became acquainted with Byron's lyric poetry in the 1830s, and there is ample evidence suggesting that he had read *Don Juan* by 1845; moreover, he even translated the song of the Modern Greek poet from Canto III (Imre 1990: 17; see also László 1932 and Szinnyei 1905). That is, János Arany was influenced by *Don Juan* regarding both *Az elveszett alkotmány* and *Bolond Istók*; yet this does not seem to be true of epic poetry in general. Canto II of *Bolond Istók* appeared only in 1873, when the verse novel was spreading anyway. In addition to Byron, *Dorottya* was available as a potential antecedent, too, as shown in section 4.2. Yet *Dorottya* had no significant continuation in the form of Hungarian mock epics preceding János Arany either that would not only have carried on using the same narrative features but that would also have embodied the central literary aspirations of contemporary high culture.

The central aspiration of Hungarian epic poetry for most part of the 19th century was the creation of the national epic (moreover, preferably in the form of a single text, see Gere 2007: 138–141). The national epic was to represent early Hungarian history, serving also as an embodiment of national identity. Many Hungarian Romantic epics stem from this aspiration and some of the most important poets of the time were involved, including Mihály Vörösmarty with *Zalán futása* [The Flight of Zalán] from 1825 and János Arany with his numerous unfinished attempts, such as the plan of the *Csaba-trilógia* [Csaba Trilogy] between 1853 and 1881, and *Buda halála* [The Death of Buda] from 1863, all of which related to early Hungarian history and mythology. Crucially, this ambition is different from that observed in English literature, where epic poetry primarily sought possible forms to replace the classical form of the serious epic, see Fischer (1991).

At the same time, it is important to point out that similar attempts can be observed in other Central-European literatures as well, although the degree to which such texts contributed to the construction of national identity greatly varies, as shown by Neubauer (2010: 12). For instance, Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* [Sir Thaddeus] from 1834 in Polish literature clearly belongs to this trend (see Koropeckyj 2010), as does Ján Botto's 1862 *Smrť Jánošíkova* [The Death of Jánošík] in Slovak literature (see Raßloff 2010: 447–448), the 1888 Latvian national romantic epic *Lāčplēsis* [Bearslayer] by Andrejs Pumpurs (see Meškova 2010: 241), or the epics of the Montenegrin poet

Petar II Petrović Njegoš, such as his 1847 *Gorski vijenac* [The Mountain Wreath], which appeared in the context of a fundamentally oral literary tradition (see Slapšak 2010).

The central role of the epic in 19th-century Hungarian literature is relevant for the verse novel for two main reasons. On the one hand, the epic as a primary literary aspiration hampered the appearance and/or the spread of the verse novel, since, as explicated in Chapter 2, one of the fundamental properties of the verse novel is the thematisation of a critical stance towards the epic. In line with this, the mock epic had a marginal status, too: as is known, the reception of *A helység kalapácsa* was not particularly positive.

Especially in the case of Csokonai's *Békaegérharc* [Battle of Frogs and Mice], the issue of colloquial language is important. Namely, colloquial language was perceived as low and plebeian from the perspective of the literary folklorist trend of national literature at the time, and was marginalised till the middle of the 19th century (see Milbacher 2000, 2007; see also S. Varga 2007a: 368–381; on the concepts regarding folklorist trends in literature, see S. Varga 2007b: 456–459). Actually, assigning *Békaegérharc* to the popular register on the basis of its style and subject matter (and thereby acknowledging its difference from the expectations towards texts belonging to high culture) is supported by the fact that it was included in several volumes of popular/folk poetry (see Lukács 2007: 69). Overall, *Dorottya* is less colloquial; however, as found before, it still contains several colloquial elements, as referred to by Csokonai in his introduction: to a significant degree, the models he refers to are rooted in popular literature (see Küllős 2007: 247). Moreover, for many 19th-century theoreticians, the fundamental question regarding Csokonai's epics is not *Dorottya* but rather his unwritten serious epic (Dávidházi 2007: 12–30; regarding Csokonai's plans to write a serious epic, see also Debreczeni 1998: 149–151).

On the other hand, the designated role of the epic also meant that, especially following the actual attempts at writing epics by the most important contemporary poets, reflecting on the epic became crucial, and the verse novel proved to be an adequate genre for this. The question is naturally more complex, and regarding the verse novel as a literary response to the idea of the national epic (and its failure), this thesis does not equal all impacts at hand. Apart from the demand for a literary response to the epic, epic poetry seems to have been expected to replace the epic by some other genre, similarly to what can be observed in English literature between 1790 and 1830 (see Chapter 3). Pál Gyulai considered the classical epic to be inadequate for modern literature, even though he regarded the epic as the most suitable genre for expressing certain national traits (Gyulai 1908: 88–105). For Gyulai, the prose novel was an important question as well, and he even wrote a novel, entitled *Egy régi udvarház utolsó gazdája* [The Last Master of an Old Manor-House]. However, he had serious reservations concerning contemporary prose novels, as expressed in

his verse novel *Romhányi* [Romhányi] as well (see the discussion in Chapter 2), primarily condemning the sensationalism and improbability often attested in novels (including Mór Jókai's works). In Gyulai's view, the verse novel was essentially a possible middle way between the epic and the (prose) novel (see Gyulai 1908: 88–105).

Considering all this, the position of the Hungarian verse novel in literary history can be described as follows, using the mock epic, the serious epic and the prose novel as anchoring points. While the mock epic (especially *Dorottya*) is undoubtedly an important potential antecedent, the appearance of related works was hindered by the central ambition of epic poetry; that is, the creation of the national epic. However, the backgrounding of this ambition not only enabled the spread of the verse novel but partly created a situation in which the previously dominant literary ambition had to be reflected on. This happened in parallel with another process in literature, which involved the foregrounding of the prose novel. On the one hand, this favoured the appearance of a more novel-like narration in epic poetry; on the other hand, it constituted a literary problem that was thematised in verse novels, which were often explicitly critical of contemporary prose novels. Finally, all this coincided in time with the appearance of Bérczy's translation of *Eugene Onegin*, and in this way, another, direct model was available for subsequent Hungarian verse novels, which unambiguously came to be interpreted as a generic model in Hungarian literary tradition.



Internal antecedents

In this chapter, I an overview the antecedents of the Hungarian verse novel within the context of narrative poetry will be given, focussing on the question what properties can be detected in 19th-century Hungarian epic poetry that could serve as antecedents for the verse novel in terms of their narrative structure. On the one hand, antecedents are important because verse novels may have made use of some of their elements (potentially reflecting on these); on the other hand, the resemblance of verse novels to their antecedents may have contributed to the narrative structure of verse novels not being alien at the time of their appearance. As shown in the previous chapters of the present dissertation, such antecedents were crucial in the case of Byron's verse novel in English literature, especially regarding the relationship between the mock epic and the verse novel. In what follows, I will investigate what generic connections must be considered apart from the mock epic. Without the intention of providing an exhaustive picture, only a few oeuvres and texts will be discussed that were especially important in 19th-century Hungarian literature; it would simply be impossible to explore the complex system of cross-generic impacts in its entirety. The connections whose existence is to some extent evident will be examined; I will concentrate on the narratological aspects, which seem to have been neglected by the relevant literature so far. Since most of these links were clarified by Imre (1990), I will start with summarising his most important findings.

5.1 History and function – Imre (1990)

As Imre (1990: 56) notes, the success and establishment of the Byronic–Pushkinian verse novel in Hungary largely resulted from the fact that the individual authors could make use of the formal innovations and the metric and linguistic heritage of Hungarian epic poetry from the decades preceding 1850. Note that this includes texts of different sorts; the mock epic tradition, including Mihály Csokonai Vitéz's *Dorottya* [Dorottya], belongs here, as does lyric poetry containing narrative elements, such as song cycles like Sándor Kisfaludy's *Himfy* [Himfy] cycles, see Imre (1990: 56).

Regarding 19th-century narrative poetry, Mihály Vörösmarty's *Szép Ilonka* [Fair Ilonka][21] is a particularly important example, primarily because verse form is for the first time linked to psychological realism in this text, and because it is characterised by a lyric tone even though it is a narrative poem (Imre 1990: 56). According to Imre

[21] The translation of the title follows Watson Kirkconnell's translation of Vörösmarty's text, as it appears in Adam Makkai's anthology.

(1990: 57), the closest antecedent is Sándor Petőfi's *Az apostol* [The Apostle][22], not only because it is centred on a contemporary topic and novel-like in its story, but also because of the subjective, lyrical tone, which is due to the foregrounding of the poet. However, as Imre (1990: 57) notes, narration is different from what we can observe in verse novels. Sándor Kisfaludy's song cycle *A kesergő szerelem* [Unhappy Love][23] is similar to verse novels in the high degree of subjectivity and the related presence of personal recollections (Imre 1990: 57). At the same time, Imre (1990: 57) notes that while the Hungarian verse novel inherited several elements of the literature of the Enlightenment and the Reform Era (roughly the period between 1770 and 1850), these elements were disparate, which contributed to the complexity and heterogeneity of the genre.

Since the verse novel, according to Imre (1990: 58), served to fulfil the role of the missing realist novel, verse narratives showing realist traits are especially important for him: examples include Sándor Kisfaludy's *A kesergő szerelem* as well as Mihály Vörösmarty's *Cserhalom* [Cserhalom] and *A két szomszédvár* [The Two Neighbouring Castles], see Imre (1990: 59). For Imre (1990: 59), the criterion of verisimilitude is crucial; hence, mock epics are in a peculiar situation as antecedents, because the most important topic of parodistic works is literature itself; yet they may also express criticism towards society and include satirical elements. From Hungarian literature, examples such as János Arany's *Az elveszett alkotmány* [The Lost Constitution], Csokonai's *Dorottya* and Ferenc Verseghy's *Rikóti Mátyás* [Mátyás Rikóti] can be mentioned (Imre 1990: 59–60). At the same time, the informal, self-ironic and playful tone that sometimes creates the impression of a lack of seriousness, is absent from the literature preceding János Arany's *Bolond Istók* [Stephen the Fool], see Imre (1990: 60). A similar tone can at best be detected in mock epics, which also show some playfulness towards the reader. In this respect, Sándor Petőfi's *A helység kalapácsa* [The Hammer of the Village] should be mentioned, in which the narrator sometimes takes leave from the reader at the end of a canto in a jesting manner, a feature later to be observed in verse novels (Imre 1990: 60–61).

The issue of foregrounding the narrator in a subjective way also has to be addressed. This can be observed to the greatest degree in Mihály Vörösmarty's works, for instance in the introductory part of *Széplak* [Széplak], and to a lesser degree in Petőfi's works, for instance, in *Salgó* [Salgó] and *Szécsi Mária* [Mária Szécsi], see Imre (1990: 61). However, Petőfi's gestures of this type are generally short and do not particularly influence the otherwise distanced way of storytelling (Imre 1990: 61). Overall, it

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22 The translation of the title follows William N. Loew's translation of Petőfi's text, which I will also use in the relevant section.

23 The translation of the title follows Watson Kirkconnell's translation of the excerpt of Sándor Kisfaludy's work, as it appears in Adam Makkai's anthology.

is unprecedented before Arany's *Bolond Istók* that the poet should step forward with his own life and recollections to become a sort of second hero (Imre 1990: 61).

The mixed language of verse novels and the apparent lack of planned composition were not characteristic of Hungarian literature. According to Imre (1990: 61–62), the first such experiment is most likely to be János Arany's *Az elveszett alkotmány*, although surprising comparisons had been present before to a lesser extent (for instance, in Petőfi's works), just like the use of foreign words in rhymes (for instance, in Csokonai's works). Kisfaludy's *Himfy* cycles contain several foreign words and intertextual references; yet, as opposed to the verse novel, by no means with the intention of achieving a humorous effect: at the same time, these features are important antecedents, just as the similar (and fundamentally comical) intertextual references of Petőfi and Verseghy (Imre 1990: 62).

The verse novels of Byron and Pushkin are characterised by the reinterpretation and parody of literary conventions. As shown by Imre (1990: 62), the parody of epic conventions is predominant in Hungarian verse novels largely because this source of comic effect was used by the Hungarian mock-epic tradition long before. At the same time, it must be stressed that the epic tradition was active in Hungarian literature during the 19th century as well (Imre 1990: 62). Epic conventions are parodied in Verseghy's *Rikóti Mátyás*, Csokonai's *Dorottya*, Petőfi's *A helység kalapácsa* and Arany's *Az elveszett alkotmány*, and to a lesser extent in Mihály Fazekas's *Lúdas Matyi* [Matt the Gooseherd];[24] in the latter, the metre (hexameter) and the topic (one close to folk tales) are in discrepancy (Imre 1990: 62–64).

In addition, literariness is characteristic of verse novels, which is largely manifest as the constant presence of intertextual references; this property also has its antecedents in Hungarian literature, for example in Sándor Kisfaludy's texts (Imre 1990: 63). A somewhat special case that can be mentioned is the presence of a large number of footnotes written by the authors, as in Verseghy's *Rikóti Mátyás* and Csokonai's *Dorottya*; in the latter case, the footnotes are complemented by Csokonai's reflexive and partly alienating summaries written at the beginning of each canto (Imre 1990: 63).

Imre (1990: 64) essentially concludes that while the verse novel was not a direct continuation of the preceding developments of Hungarian epic poetry and some external impact was necessary, there was a significant literary tradition which the verse novel could rely on later. In this sense, the verse novel cannot be described as a merely imported form in Hungarian literature, since the internal antecedents were quite similar to what was given for the verse novels of Byron and Pushkin (Imre 1990: 64–65).

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24 The translation of the title follows the translation of the excerpt of Mihály Fazekas's work by Thomas Kabdebo and Adam Makkai, as appears in Adam Makkai's anthology.

5.2 Sándor Kisfaludy's song cycles

As is clear from the analysis by Imre (1990), Sándor Kisfaludy is an important antecedent for the verse novel primarily because of the personal tone of his texts. His most important work is *Himfy* [Himfy], especially the first cycle from 1801, entitled *A kesergő szerelem* [Unhappy Love], since this had the greatest impact on contemporary literature. The beginning of the text establishes the personal tone and the self-evident presence of the speaking persona:

> Mint az Őzek az erdőben,
>   A' halak a' vizekben,
> Madarak a' levegőben,
>   'S a' méhek a' kertekben:
> Olly szabadon, 's kedvem-telve
>   Éltem egykor napjaim';
> Vígan lejtve, énekelve
> Üzém kicsiny bajaim'.
>
> *As the deer in the forest,*
>   *The fish in the water,*
> *The birds in the air,*
>   *And the bees in the gardens:*
> *So free, so delightfully*
>   *Did I once live my life;*
> *I went about my petty little things*
> *Merrily, singing.*
>
> (Sándor Kisfaludy, *Himfy: A kesergő szerelem*, Canto I, stanza 1)

The introductory part of Canto I (stanzas 1–14) describes the emotional state of the narrating persona, which involves a comparison between the previous (idyllic) state described in stanza 1 and the present state. It is important to note that the speaker does not introduce himself at this point; hence, he should be regarded as given by the reader. This kind of dominance of the poetic persona can be observed by the narrators of verse novels, too, and the starting of the texts is quite similar as well.

That the narrator's figure is given is not altered by the fact that the actual songs constitute a biography to some extent, since this biography is embedded in a personal and subjective framework, and not vice versa (that is, the narrator's figure could emerge from or at least in parallel with his biography). In fact, the presence of

a narrative frame is not restricted to Canto I, as essentially all of the cantos are constructed in such a way that an introductory part of varying length is followed by the actual songs, except for the last canto (Canto XXI), which is a “fragment” containing only the frame and no songs. Note that what I refer to as song here is *dal* ‘song’ in the Hungarian original, while canto denotes the original *ének* ‘canto, song’, which is ambiguous in Hungarian and does not necessarily designate a canto of a longer narrative poem. It may, however, be used for songs as well even though, as opposed to *dal*, it is not a genre designator. This ambiguity is relevant for the following discussion regarding the status of *Himfy* as a song cycle and as a potential narrative.

In principle, the presence of these frames could establish a reflexive relationship between the frames and the songs; yet the actual implementation of this is minimal in *Himfy*. It is true that the frame makes the songs appear as literary products within the text, but this kind of literary product is still the natural continuation of the frame, since both address the personal grieves of the same subject. Hence, there is no critical relationship between the two parts of the text, while the playful, reflexive gestures attested in verse novels are likewise absent. The function of the frame is reduced to introducing the situation unknown to the reader.

The macrostructure of the text has a further impact on the narrative structure: the story is inherently fragmented, since each of the individual songs only captures a single (and not necessarily eventful) moment of the narrator’s life. These units constitute a closed form in themselves, and it is not imperative that there be a close relation between these individual units, let alone a coherent story emerging from them. As a result, there is no narrative thread which the narrator’s reflections and remarks could be built on in such a way as in verse novels: hence, the macrostructure of *Himfy* hinders the establishment of a narrative structure comparable to the one described in Chapter 2. Apart from breaking the text up into songs, the frame which the songs are located in is divided into cantos, similarly to narrative texts; this aspect of the macrostructure makes the entire work more similar to epic poetry. Essentially this dual nature is why Onder (2003: 222–227) considers *Himfy* a literary amphibian, together with other “poetic romances” of the period, such as Csokonai’s *Lilla* [Lilla].

Embedding the lyrical utterances into a potential narrative frame is essentially absent in the second part of *Himfy*, the cycle entitled *A boldog szerelem* [Happy Love][25] from 1807, which consists of 200 songs and 7 cantos. However, the text starts with the songs; hence, the songs do not emerge from the context of the cantos. Consequently, it is rather that the cycle contains cantos and songs. Note that while the number of songs following each other is unspecified, two cantos cannot immediately follow one another. This asymmetry between songs and cantos suggests rather

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[25] The translation of the title follows Anthony Edkins’s translation of the excerpt of Sándor Kisfaludy’s work, as it appears in Adam Makkai’s anthology.

a peculiarity in the linear arrangement than any indication of a hierarchy between the two types. Of course, this is a theoretically possible option in the case of *A kesergő szerelem*, but the macrostructure there shows an inverse pattern inasmuch as both the first and the last parts of the text in the linear organisation are unambiguously cantos; thus, the songs can be interpreted as embedded, dependent texts as well. As opposed to this, in *A boldog szerelem*, both the first and the last parts are songs, and the cantos cannot be interpreted as parts of the songs. This is so because a song has a closed form; moreover, in the case of *Himfy* this means a unified structure for all songs, the so-called Himfy-stanza. By contrast, a canto is looser in its structure: recall that Hungarian *ének* is ambiguous between 'song' and 'canto', and when referring to a song, *ének* does not denote a closed structure while *dal* 'song' does (*dal* is a genre, *ének* is not). Further, *ének* in the sense of 'canto' may refer to a canto in a longer narrative poem, and as such, it is especially adequate for incorporating other, shorter texts written in verse.

Kisfaludy's tales have a different structure: here, the narrator's character to some extent appears in the frame story, which merely serves to localise the tale to be told and to sketch a situation in which the gesture of telling a tale makes sense. For instance, his *Csobáncz* [Csobáncz] from 1807 starts in the following way:

Üllу mellém a' kandallóhoz,
Fel van szíttva melege;
Csobáncz-várról, Édes-kedves,
Im! hallyad, egy agg rege: –
Múltt szüretkor Badacsonyon
Ezt Múzsámtól vettem én,
Egykor, midőn magam bolygék
A' hegy' szírtes tetején.

Sit next to me by the fireplace,
It is warm;
My sweet darling, listen, here
Is an old tale: –
I took it from my Muse
At the last harvest in Badacsony,
Once, when I was walking alone
On the top of the rocky mountain.

(Sándor Kisfaludy, *Csobáncz*, introductory stanza 1)

At this point, the text identifies the primarily targeted reader and hints at how the narrator found the tale: it is claimed that he was walking alone in nature when he received the finished text from his muse, or at least all the necessary material for the creation of the text. This kind of self-presentation is of course by no means alien to the type of poet prevalent in Romanticism, which assumes that the poet, unlike other people, has immediate access to the transcendent sphere, and has qualities that make him able to decode signs that are undecipherable for ordinary people. As will be shown in the next section, this frequently appears in Mihály Vörösmarty's works, too.

In the following stanza, the narrator briefly refers to the story (the love of László and Rózsa), but he does not reflect on either the diegetic or the extradiegetic level. Hence, the frame story (rather just situation) serves only to provide a context for narrating an older text type, in a similar way to what was observed in the case of Scott's ballads (see the relevant section of Chapter 3).

Kisfaludy's *Tátika* [Tátika] from 1807 is characterised by comparable features. His *Somló* [Somló] from 1807 differs only in that the introductory part is not sharply separated, and the entire text is not divided into cantos but only into stanzas; hence, as far as macrostructure is concerned, there is no caesura between establishing contact with the addressees and the actual story (although the difference is still detectable in terms of content).

The introductory reflections are present in a similar way in *Dobozy Mihály és hitvese* [Mihály Dobozy and his Spouse] from 1822, in *A Szent-Mihályhegyi remete* [The Hermit of Mount Saint Michael] from 1823, in *Frangepán Erzsébet* [Erzsébet Frangepán] from 1836, and in *Viola és pipacs, vagy hamis barát* [Viola and Poppy, or the False Friend] from 1838. However, there is no personal addressee in these texts, as they are rather directed at a general reading audience: with the exception of the last example, this reading audience is specified to the extent that the narrator unambiguously addresses the members of the Hungarian nation, and he presents himself as a member of the same community. The only somewhat exceptional text in this respect is *Micz bán* [Ban Micz] from 1836: at the beginning, the narrator claims that he produces the text based on "a woman's apron", which contained it in the form of embroidery. In this sense, the gesture of narrating the story is connected to a gesture that is personal to some extent; however, this has no further implications regarding the narrator's poetic inventions or the reader. These short narrative poems of Kisfaludy, embracing historical topics, are in many respects similar to ballads (although they are definitely not as concise); hence, the *Himfy*-cycles are more important for the verse novel.

Based on all these conditions, it can be concluded that Kisfaludy's narrative poetry has certain features that can be related to the later verse novel (primarily the personal tone of the narrator and to a lesser extent the contact established with the

reader). However, Kisfaludy's oeuvre concerning its narratological properties cannot be regarded as an antecedent that could have significantly contributed to the appearance of the verse novel. This antecedent is naturally not as immediate as the mock epic tradition (see the conclusions in Chapter 4) and can primarily be regarded as an indirect impact that facilitated the embedding of a genre (triggered by other factors) in the narrative poetic tradition at its appearance.

5.3 Mihály Vörösmarty's narrative poems

As pointed out by Imre (1990), the importance of Vörösmarty's epic poetry in terms of the verse novel lies primarily in the occasional foregrounding of the narrator. This naturally involves the subjectivisation of narration to some degree; yet the question still arises whether this results in reflections on the text as well, and if so, to what extent. It should be noted that several texts of Vörösmarty do not contain any subjective manifestations at all, apart from rhetorical questions, emotional exclamations and the announcing of changing the setting. Such texts include *A hűség diadalma* [The Triumph of Constancy] from 1822, *Magyarvár* [Magyarvár] from 1827, *Eger* [Eger] from 1827, *A Rom* [The Ruin] from 1829–1830, *A két szomszédvár* [The Two Neighbouring Castles] from 1830–1831, and for the most part *Cserhalom* [Cserhalom] from 1825.

5.3.1 A traditional role of the poet

Narrators tend to step forward at the beginning of the text, before starting narrating the story, rather than as gestures interrupting the flow of narration. This can be observed to some extent in the case of *Zalán futása* [The Flight of Zalán][26] from 1825:

> A' tehetetlen kor jött el, puhaságra serényebb
> Gyermekek álltak elő az erősebb jámbor apáktól.
> Engem is, a' nyugalom' napján, illy év hoza fényre
> Már késő unokát, ki előbb a' lányka' mulandó
> Szépségén függtem gondatlan gyermeki szemmel,
> 'S rajta veszett örömem' dalait panaszosra cserélvén,
> Hasztalanúl eget és földet kérlelve betölték.

[26] The translation of the title follows the translation of the excerpt of Mihály Vörösmarty's work by Watson Kirkconnell and Adam Makkai, as appears in Adam Makkai's anthology.

Még is az ifjúság' háborgó napjai múlván,
Biztos erőt érzek: kebelemben nagyra kelendő
Képzeletek villannak meg, diadalmas Ügekről,
'S a deli Álmosról, 's Álmosnak büszke fiáról,
Párduczos Árpádról... Óh hon! meghallasz-e engem,
'S nagyra törő tehetősb fiaid hallgatnak-e szómra?

The impotent age arrived, children more prompt for softness
Arose from the stronger pious fathers.
I too was brought forth to light by such a year, on the day of calmness,
Already a late grandson, whose carefree childless eyes were first fascinated
By the passing beauty of the maid,
And changing my songs of joys lost for her to ones of sorrow,
I filled the sky and the earth begging in vain.
Yet, the raging days of youth having passed,
I feel firm strength: ambitious fantasies
Light up in my bosom, about triumphant Ügek,
And mighty Álmos, and Álmos's proud son,
Árpád with the panther-skin... Oh, homeland! will you hear me,
And will your ambitious potent sons mark my words?

(Mihály Vörösmarty, *Zalán futása*, Canto I, lines 11–23)

However, it is important to note that the narrator in this case markedly speaks as a member of the nation, moreover, as a member of the audience's generation, and his personal reminiscence is subordinated to the generational contrast sketched in the text. On the other hand, the narrator's person is interesting only in his quality of a poet, and contrasting the subsequent roles of the younger poet writing about love and the mature poet writing an epic is known from the epic tradition as well, one of the best-known examples being Miklós Zrínyi's *Szigeti veszedelem* [The Siege of Sziget] from 1651. The distinctive position of the poet is shown by the reference to the fact that "ambitious fantasies light up" (Hungarian *„nagyra kelendő képzeletek villannak meg*") in him, which are not visible for other members of the nation. This line of thoughts evolves in lines 26–31, too, in which the poet is depicted as a seer, who, as opposed to others, does not sleep at night but is awakened by the apparitions of the national past. Hence, he is presented as the only possible mediator between the national past and the current members of the nation. However, this kind of self-presentation is a typical cliché of Romantic poetry, and as such, it does not involve any particularly personal aspect in the case of *Zalán futása* either.

The figure of the poet in love becomes more personal only in Canto XI. The narrator changes the scene from the battlefield to the topic of the lovers Hajna and Ete, starting this part by addressing his audience (or the remaining part of the originally purported audience), who he thinks would rather like to hear about Hajna and Ete (lines 13–24). In the following part, he answers the relevant reconstructed questions:

Elmondom, 's megeredt szavaimnak szűnete nem lesz,
Míg nem hirdetek új örömet Bodrogköz' urairól,
Kedvesek ők nekem is, kedves vagy Hajna, te főkép,
Szűz hajadon, szép szőke fodorhaju lánya Hubának;
Mert te, midőn nyugszom, hitető álmomhoz is eljősz,
És köszönöd, hogy szűz ajakidról, 's szőke hajadról
Édes szózatokat mondék, 's kaczagányos Etéről,
A' ki erőre nagy a harczban, szépségre legelső.
Ezt köszönöd, 's ekkor látom megnyílni szelíden
Bíboros ajkaidat, 's füleim lágy hangidat érzik.
Ekkoron a' havazó karokat meglátom, az égből
Isteni szikra gyanánt szállott szem' tiszta világát.
Délnek völgye, szivem' titkának régi hazája,
Dél' völgyében is illy tüzes a' lány' szép szeme. Rajtam,
Nem könyörűl; de megöl ragyogó sugarával utóbb is.
Vagy hova vesztem el így?... Megtérek Hajna, tehozzád.

I will tell, and the flow of my words will have no pause,
Until I announce new joy about the lords of Bodrogköz,
They are dear to me as well, you are especially dear, Hajna,
Virgin maid, fair blonde wavy-haired daughter of Huba;
For you, when I rest, come even to my deceiving dreams,
And thank me for having written sweet words about your virgin lips,
And your blonde hair, and cloak-wearing Ete,
Who is great in strength in battle, first in beauty.
You thank for this, and then I see your ruby lips
Gently opening, and my ears sense your soft sounds.
Then I behold the snow-white arms, the pure light
Of the eyes that is like a divine spark falling from the sky.
Valley of the South, long since the homeland of my heart's secret,
The beautiful eyes of the maids are just as fiery in the valley of the South. They have

No pity on me; but they kill with their shining rays subsequently as well.
Or where have I got lost so?… I return to you, Hajna.

(Mihály Vörösmarty, *Zalán futása*, Canto IX, lines 25–40)

The dialogical relationship towards the audience is in several respects similar to verse novels, although the expectations of the narrator and the reader are in harmony, which is why no critical distance is established comparable to what can often be observed in verse novels.

Other features reminiscent of verse novels are digression and reflections on it. However, while the narrator indeed digresses from the specific character of Hajna and starts to reflect on his personal experiences, he does not do so at a rather arbitrary point of the story interrupting the narration of some action or even a critical event. Hence, this kind of digression does not involve a direct confrontation with the reader's expectations either. Moreover, this instance of digression is not particularly long, while its content is personal. A simila,r yet even shorter and not personal digression with a corresponding reflexion can be observed in *Cserhalom* as well (lines 344–348), which is, however, related to the topos of the glorious past and the degenerate present of the nation, which is of course reflected on several times in *Zalán futása*.

The designated position of the poet is stressed at the beginning of *Tündérvölgy* [The Valley of the Fairies] from 1825:

Mit tudtok ti hamar halandó emberek,
Ha lángképzelődés nem játszik veletek?
Az nyit mennyországot, poklot előttetek:
Bele néztek mélyen, 's elámúl lelketek.

Én is olly dalt mondok világ' hallatára,
Mellynek égen, földön ne légyen határa,
A' mit fül nem hallott, a' szem meg nem jára,
Azt én írva lelém lelkem' asztalára.

What do you know, early dying people,
If fiery imagination does not play with you?
That opens heaven and hell before you:
You look into its depths, and your souls are amazed.

I too will sing such a song to the world
That should have no limits in the sky or on earth,

What no ear has heard, no eye has seen
I have found written on the desk of my soul.

(Mihály Vörösmarty, *Tündérvölgy*, stanzas 1–2)

However, an important difference from *Zalán futása* is that the designated position of the poet is not interpreted with respect to the nation (that is, as an entity who is able to recall the national past), but in a more general and at the same time more personal way. The poet's imagination can open a quasi-transcendental sphere, and this ability of the poet is justified for its own sake; it is not subordinated to a task related to the self-interpretation of the nation. (It is worth mentioning that a similar gesture can be observed at the beginning of *A Délsziget* [An Island in the South] from 1862.)

The narrator's dominance is of course not alien to verse novels either; yet the kind of dominance attested in Vörösmarty's text has different dynamics. In *Tündérvölgy*, a typical Romantic role of the poet is featured, according to which the poet gives something to his audience (which is here humankind in its entirety). By contrast, in verse novels, as was shown in Chapters 2 and 3, the gesture of withholding information (arbitrarily) is more prominent, and it applies to narrators who are not omniscient. Apart from the different nature of dominance, the status of the text to be narrated is dissimilar as well: the narrator of *Tündérvölgy* intends to create a wonderful, quasi-perfect text which was bestowed upon him as a unified whole. In verse novels, however, the text to be narrated is typically intertwined with the displaying of improvisation and the process of writing. Furthermore, even though the text is claimed to be aesthetically superior to several literary works and/or the expectations of the reader, the transcendental pre-givenness of the text is untypical, and would in fact act against the playful character of the text.

Apart from the opening gesture, *Tündérvölgy* also mainly manifests the presence of the narrator and the audience in the form of exclamations and rhetorical questions, except for the last stanza, which contains an explicit remark addressing (part of) the audience. The text ends with the wedding of Csaba (the hero) and Jeve (Dalma's daughter), and the narrator says the following:

'S örül vele a' szűz, Dalma' szép leánya –
De ti lánykák! most ne menjetek hozzája:
Nincsen az életnek több illy pillantása,
Rövid; de századnál drágább birhatása.

And with him rejoices the virgin, Dalma's fair daughter –
But you maids! do not go to her now:
Life has no more such moments,
It is short; but possessing it is worth more than a century.

(Mihály Vörösmarty, *Tündérvölgy*, stanza 199)

The closing stanza presupposes the existence of a situation in which not only the narrator is so close to his audience that he can address it or part of it directly, but also the selected members of the audience (the maids) are in the same space and time as the heroes of the poem, since they could go to them. Moreover, the remark refers to an action (or its preferred absence) simultaneous with the narrator's speech, which is reminiscent of the tradition of oral poetry. All this amounts to the evocation of an archetypical situation in which the poet and his audience are members of the same community, and the recited story is likewise about some members of this community. In this sense, the closing gesture of *Tündérvölgy* is largely similar to Scott's narrative poems, especially in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (see the relevant section of Chapter 3). The evocation of this immediate, oral situation is, however, again different from the narrative game typical of verse novels, which is based on (multiple) reflections on the written text and on indirectness as well as on the juxtaposition of the two types of relationship between poet and audience.

5.3.2 The poet's invisibility and some more personal aspects

Based on the previous subsection, it seems that in most cases, even gestures that are reflexive to some extent either refer to a certain point of the text (digressions) or appear at the very beginning or end of the work and function as reflections anticipating or summarising the entire text. Further, they do not go much beyond identifying the topic and positioning the narrator; the quality of the text is hardly thematised. The starting of Canto II of *Délsziget* [An Island in the South] is somewhat exceptional:

„Vége nyugalmadnak! kelj, kelj föl az álom' öléből
Szúnyadozó gyermek! „Hadadúr és Szűdeli," Kelj föl,
Láss ragyogó napot és indúlj sorsodnak elébe."
Hangzik az ég, és e' szavakat harsogja magából.
„A' kik imént a gyermeki kort láttátok enyelgő
Kéje' lefolytában, halljátok az ifju napoknak

Tetteit is: kik előbb név nélkül játsztanak, itt már
Rettentő Hadadúr, és bájos Szűdeli lesznek.
Ah föl az álomból szendergő lányka! ki hagyna
Tégedet illy gyönyörűt álomba temetve tovább is?
Föl te szelíd alak, ég és föld nem hagynak alunni;
Föl te dicső gyermek, Hadadúr, föl Szűdeli. Elfut
Rajtatok a' sebes év' szárnyas nyila, keljetek immár."

"Your ease has ended! get, get up from the lap of dream,
Sleeping child! "Hadadúr and Szűdeli," get up,
See a shining sun and go to meet your fate."
The sky sounds, and resounds the following words from itself:
"Those who till now have seen the childish age flowing
In its dallying lust, hear now the deeds of young days
As well: who were previously playing without names, shall now be
Formidable Hadadúr and charming Szűdeli.
Ah, get up from sleep, dozing maid! who would
Leave you, such a beauty, buried into sleep any longer?
Get up, you tame figure, heaven and earth do not let you sleep;
Get up, you glorious child, Hadadúr, get up, Szűdeli. The winged arrow
Of the swift year flies above you, get up now."

(Mihály Vörösmarty, *A Délsziget*, Canto II, lines 1–13)

The narrator refers to the fact that the readers/listeners previously did not know the names of the two protagonists; the act of naming coincides not only with the border between childhood and adulthood but also with the compositional caesura between the two cantos. At the same time, there is no reference indicating that the absence of naming in Canto I should be attributed to an arbitrary decision of the narrator, just as the act of naming is not directly carried out by the narrator but stems from a heavenly speech. Moreover, naming is not merely detecting names that have already been assigned to the characters, but it is unambiguously presented as an act of name-giving; hence, the lack of names in Canto I is not so much a matter of how the text is constructed but it is rather part of reflecting the world order displayed in the text. The self-consciousness of the text is thus restricted to the acknowledgement of this reflected absence, and to the fact that the information gap on the reader's part is also considered. Moreover, interruption has a similar function to what can be observed at the beginning of Canto I, which is announcing the topic. In this case, this

is special in that it is an instance of topic change, which has the additional function of informing the reader about an elapsed time not reflected in narration otherwise.

Based on the previous remarks, it can be established that reflections and/or personal manifestations from the narrator's part are typically placed at the beginning of Vörösmarty's narrative poems, and they often do not go beyond the function of specifying the topic. Regarding subjectivity, it is important to examine the beginning of *Széplak* [Széplak] from 1828, in which the narrator steps forward in a personal way. This is important especially because he does not reflect on the actual story (or does so only to a very limited extent). Hence, the narrator, strictly speaking, does not fulfil his role as a narrator at this point; he rather acts as a speaker whose personal speech is self-evident and does not need to be interpreted in relation to a story or a topic. (Regarding the distinction between speech and narration, especially from a historical viewpoint, see, for instance, Freidenberg 1994: 258–263, 280–282). This kind of speech is fairly similar to how several verse novels, such as László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages], start. The beginning of *Széplak* is as follows:

> Mint zaj elől fut az erdőnek fejedelme, az alban
> Fölriadott szarvas, 's csörtetve az őszi levél közt
> Mind addig viszi büszke fejét hátára hajoltan,
> Míg vég rengetegét szaladással eléri Bakonynak:
> Úgy az idő fut lelkem elől 's vágyaimnak előle;
> Elrohan a' feledés' honjába, hol a' patak immár
> Nem csörög, ősz partján a' fáradt szép Rege szúnyad,
> 'S a' rokon Álomnak szó nélkül nyugszik ölében.
>
> *As the lord of the woods, the deer awaken in the valley*
> *Runs from din, and, crashing among the autumn leaves, takes his*
> *Proud head bent towards his back up until*
> *He reaches the infinite forest of Bakony by running:*
> *So does time run from my soul and from my desires;*
> *It runs to the homeland of oblivion, where the brook does not rattle*
> *Any more, on its greyish bank the tired, fair Tale is sleeping,*
> *And is resting in the lap of its relative, Dream, without uttering a word.*
>
> (Mihály Vörösmarty, *Széplak*, lines 1–8)

At this point, no information is given regarding the person of the narrator; yet the way he speaks and remembers has a markedly personal tone: his personal remembering process leads him to the homeland of oblivion and to searching for forgotten stories.

Nevertheless, the picture presented here has a crucial role in the interpretation of the story as well. The story to be narrated is in fact a tale, which is essentially preserved by the place where it is set; that is, the ruin of Széplak. Hence, while the tale is present in a certain way, the verbal presentation of the story is not possible without special access: the tale is forgotten, and is resting in the "lap" of dream, thus it is accessible through dreams and possibly, in a figurative sense, through poetic imagination. However, the privilege of access and understanding is in this case given to the narrator not only due to his role as a poet but also because he is personally attached to the given locus, as is clear from the subsequent part of the introductory section:

Téged is, oh Völgység! az idő kiragadjon-e tőlem,
Szóljak-e mindenről, ha dal ébreszt, csak ne te rólad?
És ha neved zendűl nagy késő korra lejutván,
Senki ne tudja, hogy olly szentté lett tájad előttem?
Hogy fiatalságom' tündér országa te voltál?
Halmaidat koszorúzza borág, koszorúzza tetődet
Százados erdőség; köztök, mint égi maradvány,
Nyúlnak el a' völgyek, fiatal szépséggel igézők:
Ott mikor elfáradt testem nyugalomra hanyatlik,
Lelkem az ifjúság' képét öltözve magára,
Ábrándozva bolyong egyedűl a' csörge pataknál,
'S szárnyain ismét a' szerelemnek hordja bilincseit,
'S hordja szelíd kötelét az elomló szőke hajaknak.

You too, oh, Völgység! should time tear you from me,
Should I sing of everything but you when songs wake me?
And when your name sounds, reaching a very late age,
Should no one know that your landscape became so sacred for me?
That you were the fairyland of my youth?
Your hillocks are rimmed by grapevines, your top is rimmed
By hundred-year-old woods; in between, as celestial remainders,
Span the valleys, charming with young beauty:
There, when my tired body takes rest,
My soul, putting on the face of youth,
Dreamingly wanders about the rattling rivulet by itself,
And again, wears the fetters of love on its wings,
And wears the meek cord of unravelled blonde hairs.

(Mihály Vörösmarty, *Széplak*, lines 9–21)

In this way, Völgység is obviously a designated locus for the narrator, one that is related to his own youth: on the one hand, he is conscious of this; on the other hand, if he falls asleep there, the given locus makes it possible for him to re-live the one-time experiences in his dream (hence, in his unconscious state). That is, the world of dreams is not only able to evoke tales (understood as stories independent of the narrator) but also the personal past of the narrator, thus making the two strongly intertwined due to the common locus.

However, youth is essentially unreachable outside the realm of dreams; the only approach that can evoke youth to some extent is poetry:

> Álmaiból virradnia, haj! mért kelle; miért kell,
> Megsiratott szép völgy! szemeimtől messze maradnod,
> Hogy soha több víg hang dallód' ajakára ne keljen,
> És legyen a' dalban minden szava, mint szive olly bús?
> De te nevezve maradsz kedvemben búmban egyenlőn
> Legkésőbb napomig, 's melly tájadon őrzi regéit,
> Állni fog emlekeim közepett a' széplaki bús rom.
>
> *To wake from its dreams, alas! Bewailed, fair valley!*
> *why did you have to, why do you have to stay far away from my eyes,*
> *So that your singer should no longer sing merry tunes,*
> *And that all the words of his songs should be as sad as his heart?*
> *But you will still be addressed in my good spirits as in my sad ones*
> *Till my very last day, and the sad ruin of Széplak,*
> *Which preserves the tales of your landscape, will stay among my memories.*
>
> (Mihály Vörösmarty, *Széplak*, lines 22–28)

The ruin of Széplak is especially important in terms of Völgység, since it preserved the tales of the landscape. However, the narrator has a special way of accessing the tale: dream and poetic imagination can evoke a verbal tale from a nonverbal entity (the ruin of Széplak). The possibility of access stems partly from the narrator's status of a poet, and partly from his personal attachment to the locus in question.

This solution is similar to what can be observed at the beginning of Kisfaludy's *Micz bán* [Ban Micz], in which the narrator is supposed to produce the text based on "a woman's apron" (which contained it in the form of embroidery). The role of the poet is again to decode a nonverbal string of signs into a verbal one, and some personal motif can be observed as well. However, the embroidery on the apron is presumably a nonverbal, visual narrative, and in this case, the narrator in a way fulfils

the role of a translator. By contrast, in the case of Széplak, the ruin is not narrative, and the narrator has to create a narrative from an entity that is indivisible from a narratological viewpoint. The way of decoding is dream, and as soon as this way is available, the narrative quasi unfolds.

This question is especially interesting because it provides an interpretation for the problematics of the past addressed in the story. In the story, the young Kálmán Orbai escapes from the house of his guardians, taking only a shield with him from his paternal inheritance: however, this shield has become black with time, and its design is not visible. On his way, Orbai reaches the house of Ugod, who is in fact a distant relative of his: Ugod is away, fighting somewhere else; his wife, Zenedő, accommodates Orbai for a few days. One day, Orbai notices Ugod's shield hanging on the wall, and he starts polishing his own: it turns out that the design of his shield is identical with the design of Ugod's shield. However, it is not by chance that Ugod has never used the shield: the design depicts his ancestor Kupa (also known as Koppány, a 10th-century pagan duke who was eventually executed), as his corpse is being guarded; the shield constitutes a hard, sinister inheritance for the descendants of Kupa. The reason why the shield is not used is primarily an attempt to prevent a resurrection of the past; yet Orbai is unaware of all this and keeps on carrying his own, identical shield on his way. The past that has thus become visible is not interpretable to Orbai, and Ugod makes a mistake when trying to deduce its reference from the present: on his way home, he by chance sees Orbai with the shield, which he takes for his own: this leads him to think that Zenedő has been unfaithful to him. He is unable to kill Orbai, who flees in time; yet he does kill Zenedő on his arrival at home and realises too late that his shield is naturally still on the wall. In this sense, the sinister narrative unfolds merely because it has access to a surface via which it can connect to the present, from which it was separated by the shield (the surface) either hanging on the wall or by being black.

In this way, the narrator's preface and the actual story are in a relation that projects the two dimensions upon each other. This creates a reflexive relationship; apart from this, however, no other significant reflections can be detected.

In sum, it can be established that while Vörösmarty's narrative poetry has several aspects that can be related to the narrative structure characteristic of verse novels, the number of true reflections is low. Moreover, these reflections are typically present at the beginning of the texts, and the internal reflections are mostly short and personal digressions that still do not disrupt the process of narrating the story, similarly to the reflections placed at the beginning. On the other hand, the gestures in question refer to the textual properties of the text only to a limited degree; hence, the linguistic and literary properties of the individual texts are not thematised. Thus most of the gestures that can be related to the verse novel have to do with the personal tone of the narrator: however, as was shown in this section, the narrator's character often has the

traditional Romantic attributes of the poet, and the personal aspect is therefore limited. Consequently, Vörösmarty is undoubtedly closer to the verse novel than Kisfaludy, yet his role in terms of the genre was likewise limited to facilitating the embeddedness of the later verse novel in Hungarian literary tradition.

5.4 Sándor Petőfi and the verse narrative

The last part of this chapter is devoted to the analysis of the narrative properties of Sándor Petőfi's narrative poetry. Since I examined *A helység kalapácsa* [The Hammer of the Village] in Chapter 4 in connection with the mock epic in detail, essentially three texts remain to be discussed here: *János vitéz* [Childe John][27] from 1844, *Bolond Istók* [Simple Steve][28] from 1847, and *Az apostol* [The Apostle] from 1848.

5.4.1 A narrator telling a tale

The narrator of *János vitéz* [Childe John] does not step forwardor make remarks often (if he does, it mostly involves exclamations and rhetorical questions only, see for instance Canto XVII, stanza 4). However, in Canto IX, he speaks as a member of a community (the Hungarian nation) when in the story János reaches Italy with the army:

> Itt semmi különös nem történt népünkkel,
> Csak hogy küzködnie kellett a hideggel,
> Mert Taljánországban örökös tél vagyon;
> Mentek katonáink csupa havon, fagyon.
>
> No de a magyarság erős természete,
> Bármi nagy hideg volt, megbirkozott vele;

---

[27] The translation of the title follows William N. Loew's translation of Petőfi's text, from which I will also use quotes. The title of the work identifies the hero. At the beginning of the text, the hero is referred to as *Kukoricza Jancsi* 'Johnny Corn' or simply as *Jancsi* 'Johnny'; later, when he does a great service to the French king, he is raised in rank to be named *János vitéz* 'Childe John'. In order to avoid confusion, and to be consistent in using the original (Hungarian) names, I will refer to the hero as "János" in the text of the dissertation, as the distinction between the two names of the hero is not relevant to the purposes here.

[28] The translation of the title follows William N. Loew's translation of Petőfi's text, from which I will also use quotes. Note that the Hungarian title of Petőfi's work is in fact identical with that of János Arany's *Bolond Istók*, which I have translated so far as "Stephen the Fool", as the latter has some attested examples in secondary literature. I will keep the difference in the translation of the titles, which may enhance clarity.

Aztán meg, ha fáztak, hát kapták magokat,
Leszálltak s hátokra vették a lovakat.[29]

Here nothing special happened to out people,
Exvept that they had to fight against the cold,
For in Italy there is everlasting winter;
Our soldiers marched only on snow and ice.

But the strong Hungarian nature,
No matter how cold it was, fought against it;
And then, if they felt cold, well, then they simply
Mounted down and took their horses on their backs.

(Sándor Petőfi, *János vitéz*, Canto IX, stanzas 2–3)

The designations "*our people*" (Hungarian: "*népünk*") and "*our soldiers*" (Hungarian: "*katonáink*") unambiguously indicate that not only János and the soldiers are Hungarians but also the narrator and his audience (a similar instance can be found in Canto XI, stanza 4). In this way, the participants of the discourse appear in the text to some extent; yet this has no further effect on the narrative structure, since in what follows neither the narrator nor the group of readers/listeners are specified; furthermore, they definitely do not prove to be factors disturbing the narration of the story. The playfulness of the text is primarily due to its quality of connecting the non-fictional world of the text (where the narrator and his audience belong) with the world presented in the story, while changes from the rational into the irrational often take place without transition.

A similar shift can be observed in connection with the giants' land, where the narrator describes the size of every object by creating the impression of exaggerating (instead of giving the dimensions that are credible within the fictitious world). A prime example for this is the description of the giants' king's castle:

---

[29] In William N. Loew's translation:

Naught happened there at all that needs to be told,
Except, that they encountered bitter cold.
For there 't is always winter as we know,
Our men marched o'er eternal ice and snow.

But Magyar blood flowed in their veins, and so
However cold, they bravely onward go.
To warm themselves a bit, what did they do?
Their horses bore on their own backs! That's true!

Nem hazudok, de volt akkora kapuja,
Hogy, hogy… biz én nem is tudom, hogy mekkora,
Csak hogy nagy volt biz az, képzelni is lehet;
Az óriás király kicsit nem építtet.[30]

I am not lying, but its gate was so big
That, that… well, I don't even know how big,
But that it was very big, you can imagine;
For the giant king surely would not have a small one built.

(Sándor Petőfi, *János vitéz,* Canto XX, stanza 6)

At this point, the narrator appears in the text, and although he does not mention how he actually gained access to what he tells about, he indicates that his access is limited. However, the narrative gesture in the quotation above primarily suggests that the narrator is inventing the story, which he tries to make as credible as possible (as indicated by his claim in line 1 that he is not lying); moreover, the invention of certain details of the story is spontaneous, which evokes a situation of oral reciting. This immediacy is strengthened by his remark two stanzas later, when János enters the castle:

No hanem hisz ugyan volt is mit látnia!
Ebédelt a király s tudj' isten hány fia.
Hanem mit ebédelt, ki nem találjátok;
Gondolnátok-e, mit, csupa kősziklákat.[31]

But he did indeed have something to see!
The king and god knows how many of his sons were having dinner.
But what he was having for dinner, you would not guess;
Would you think what, only stony rocks.

(Sándor Petőfi, *János vitéz,* Canto XX, stanza 8)

---

[30] In William N. Loew's translation:

I'll not exaggerate, the doors were great,
As big as, – well – I can not even state,
The doors must have been big, – you'll guess with ease, –
A giant king can not through small doors squeeze.

[31] In William N. Loew's translation:

He opened the door. The king and his – God knows
How many sons – just dined. Do you suppose
You know what was their meal? You'll never guess.
Some mighty chunks of rocks had been their mess.

At this point, the narrator addresses his audience, assuming that the audience would not be able to guess what the giants are eating. This gesture and the tone are in many respects similar to telling a tale, which results in a dominant position of the narrator with respect to the audience. At the same time, this dominance is not thematised in the way it is in verse novels, and it does not interrupt the narration of the story, nor does it cause an information gap for the reader: in spite of his dominance, the narrator is fundamentally cooperative.

In stanza 6 quoted above, the reference to the narrator's competence being somewhat limited is not so much about the lack of information as rather about the fact that the narrator does not find a suitable linguistic expression (or at the given point specifically a simile) that could properly describe the sight in question. A similar instance can be observed at the end of the text, when the narrator finds it impossible to describe his hero's joy on being reunited with his love, Iluska (the name is a diminutive form of Ilona, the Hungarian version of Helen):

Mindent el tudnék én beszélni ékesen,
Csak János vitéznek akkori kedvét nem,
Mikor Iluskáját a vizből kihozta,
S rég szomjas ajakán égett első csókja.[32]

I could tell you everything eloquently,
But for Child John's feelings
When he took his Iluska out of the water
And his first kiss burnt on his lips, long thirsty.

(Sándor Petőfi, *János vitéz*, Canto XXVII, stanza 9)

This point again does not demonstrate playing with information gaps or withholding information, or with uttering or not uttering certain details (the latter type was exemplified by János Vajda's *Találkozások* [Encounters], see Chapter 2). The narrator here merely points out that János was very happy, which would be so difficult to describe that he does not even attempt to do so.

[32] In William N. Loew's translation:
Most eloquently I could tell you all,
Except the feelings which John's soul enthral
When he his Helen held in fond embrace
When he with burning lips could kiss her face!

Regarding the relationship of the narrator and the hero, it is worth mentioning that the narrator is somewhat attached not only to his audience but also to his hero, although selecting the hero is not presented as a problem at the beginning of the text. The narration starts with the opening scene in which Iluska is washing in the brook and János is watching her; the narratorthen announces who the characters are as a self-evident fact:

Kis leány szoknyája térdig föl van hajtva,
Mivelhogy ruhákat mos a fris patakba';
Kilátszik a vizből két szép térdecskéje
Kukorica Jancsi gyönyörűségére.

Mert a pázsit fölött heverésző juhász
Kukorica Jancsi, ki is lehetne más?
Ki pedig a vízben a ruhát tisztázza,
Iluska az, Jancsi szivének gyöngyháza.[33]

The maiden's skirt is rolled up to her knee,
As she is washing clothes in the fresh rivulet;
Her two pretty knees can be seen above the water
Much to the enjoyment of Johnny Corn.

For the shepherd lying in the grass
Is Johnny Corn, who else could be it?
And she who is washing clothes in the water
Is Iluska, the mother pearl of Johnny's heart.

(Sándor Petőfi, *János vitéz,* Canto I, stanzas 5–6)

[33] In William N. Loew's translation:

The maiden's skirt is rolled up to her knee,
– Washing her linen sheets she would be free, –
Her bare feet were a most inspiring sight
To Kukoricza John's heartfelt delight.

The shepherd lad, reclining on the lawn,
Who could he be? Our Kukoricza John!
In her, who in her brooklet laves her sheet
Helen, his fond heart's pearly gem we greet.

The narrator names János (as Kukoricza Jancsi 'Johnny Corn') quasi by accident. In the next stanza, he identifies him with the shepherd, and takes it for granted that he could be nobody else; at the same time, he of course introduces Iluska, too. However, the selection of the hero is not thematised in the way it is in verse novels; moreover, the hero appears at the very beginning of the text (referred to as the shepherd), and the narrator's role is, hence, essentially reduced to narrating the story of the hero. Occasional reflections later also merely indicate his role as a narrator and author, whose person is not described in more detail:

> Vándorolgatott az én János vitézem,
> Meggyógyult már szive a bútól egészen,
> Mert mikor keblén a rózsaszálra nézett,
> Nem volt az többé bú, a mit akkor érzett.[34]
>
> *My Childe John roamed about,*
> *His heart had already fully recovered from his woe,*
> *For when he looked upon the rose pinned to his breast*
> *What he then felt was no longer woe.*
>
> (Sándor Petőfi, *János vitéz*, Canto XXII, stanza 1)

The designation "*my Childe John*" (Hungarian: "*az én János vitézem*") indicates a somewhat personal attachment of the narrator to his hero, which cannot be detected earlier in the text. At the same time, this does not go beyond the basic structure of the relationship between narrator and hero; hence, the narrator's attachment to his hero arises not only during the narration but also due to narration, and yet no personal connection is to be supposed that would be independent of their roles in the narrative. In addition, this type of personal involvement can be extended to the audience as well, as shown by the beginning of Canto XXIV:

[34] In William N. Loew's translation:

> John roamed about, here, there and everywhere,
> He felt relieved e'en of his woe and care.
> Did he look at the rose pinned to his breast
> It did him not with painful thoughts molest.

Vitte az óriás János vitézünket;
Nagy lába egyszerre félmérföldet lépett,
Három hétig vitte szörnyü sebességgel,
De a tulsó partot csak nem érhették el.[35]

The giant took our Childe John;
His huge legs made half a mile in one step,
He took him with awful speed,
Yte they could not reach the opposite shore.

(Sándor Petőfi, *János vitéz,* Canto XXIV, stanza 1)

The designation "*our Childe John*" (Hungarian: "*János vitézünk*") obviously involves the audience as well, in an analogical way to the mechanism described above: at this point of the text, after several adventures, the hero is known by the audience, too, with whom the audience, similarly to the narrator, sympathises. The gestures highlighted are thus explicit markers of a certain mechanism of the narrative structure, while they are not topics that would result in digression (however minimal) from the narration of the story.

Regarding narrative structure, then, *János vitéz* cannot be seen as an immediate antecedent for the verse novel. At the same time, it should be stressed that there are quite a few similarities regarding the tone: the text often creates the impression of being improvised, partly because the evoked speech situation (which I compared to telling a tale above) suggests that communication is direct. Colloquial tone and improvisation can indeed be associated with the verse novel, while directness implies a difference as well, since in verse novels, as was shown, the indirectness following from the written nature of the text (and the playing with this indirectness) can be regarded as a fundamental property of the reflexive narrative structure characteristic of the genre.

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[35] In William N. Loew's translation:

The giant carried John with mighty strides,
With each step over many miles he rides.
He carried him three weeks with awful speed,
The other shore to reach though not succeed.

5.4.2 A narrator using comic effects

The presence of the narrator is also limited in *Bolond Istók* [Simple Steve]. This starts with a monologue of the hero (Istók), and the reader is acquainted with the actual speech situation (that the hero addressed a rain shower) and the speaker (that he is a young man) only later. The narrator utters his name later as if by accident:

> Ezt gondolta, s összevissza
> Gondolt minden tarkabarkát,
> És miért ne gondolt volna?
> Hisz bolond Istóknak híták.[36]
>
> *This he thought and randomly*
> *He thought funny things,*
> *And why should he not have done so?*
> *He was called simple Steve, after all.*
>
> (Sándor Petőfi, *Bolond Istók*, stanza 57)

In connection with foolish thoughts, as an explanation, the narrator adds that the young man is called Bolond Istók ('Simple Steve', 'Foolish Steve'); at the same time, he implies that this fact is obviously known by the reader, although this is the first piece of information regarding the name of the character in the text. Based on the title and the young man's behaviour so far, it is of course possible to deduce that the young man in question is specified in the title; yet this does not change that fact that the actual presentation of the hero is missing in the text. This is partly similar to what was said in connection with *János vitéz* [Childe John], although in that case, the hero is identified by his name in the first stanzas already. Hence, the two gestures are similar only in terms of their rhetoric but not in terms of narrative structure.

However, the narrator's attitude towards Istók is not reduced to his repeated statements describing how foolish Istók is. Istók joins the household of an elderly farmer and cleans the entire cottage in a few days. In this regard, the narrator says the following:

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[36] In William N. Loew's translation:

> Such thoughts and thoughts like these went through his mind,
> A thousand funny things he thought that eve.
> Why should he not have day-dreams of this kind,
> Was he not known by name as "Simple Steve?"

S ez, bolond Istók öcsém,
Ez mind a te munkád,
Ember vagy, ember a lelked is,
Akárki mit mond rád.

Tudja ő jól, mit hogyan kell,
Hagyjátok csak őt magára,
Tudja azt is, hogy a szép lyány
Nem haragszik a virágra.[37]

And this, my good fellow Istók,
This is all your work,
Your are a man, your soul is manly as well,
No matter who says what about you.

He knows how to do what,
Let him to himself,
He also knows that a fair girl
Does not get angry at a flower.

(Sándor Petőfi, *Bolond Istók*, stanzas 155–156)

The narrator at this point defends Istók from various accusations; the source of which is in fact not known: the narrator's imperative remark suggests that the accusations are simultaneous with narration; hence, the narrator can react to them directly. Defence may be necessary against people in the world of the narrated story who used to mock Istók; on the other hand, defence may be necessary against the potential recipients of the text. However, the turn in the narrator's attitude (or its explication) is not

[37] In William N. Loew's translation (note that the first sentence starts in the previous stanza ending in "*to every one endeared*" in Loew's translation):

Is Simple Steve, who did it all. He did
What he had planned most thoroughly and well.
During the evening host and lady bid
Him of one of his funny stories tell.

His was a master mind he seemed to know
By intuition what to say or do,
He knew that in the field sweet flowers
Which girls will always with great pleasure view.

Loew's translation in this case does not follow the Hungarian original properly. Since I discuss some important features of the text in detail, the verbatim translation is more relevant here.

so much a narrative game as rather part of the general change that prepares a happy conclusion for the story, following the discussion of Istók's foolishness.

Yet there is one point where the narrator reflects on the written nature of the text: apparently, Istók is about to fall in love (mutually) with the farmer's granddaughter, when the narrator says the following:

És igy telnek, igy röpűlnek
Órák és napok,
Sőt még ugy sem hazudok, ha
Mondok egy pár hónapot.

Hogy mult el hogyan nem,
Azt nem tudja senki,
De hogy elmult szépen,
Nem tagadja senki.

S már akárhogyan húzzuk halasztjuk,
Végre is csak el kell mondani…
Szinte restelem leírni,
Olyan furcsa valami.[38]

And thus pass, thus fly
Hours and days,
Moreover, I am still not lying if
I say a few months.

[38] In William N. Loew's translation (note that the last sentence ends in the subsequent stanza in Loew's translation, to be quoted below):

Thus are filled out, thus fly the hours and days,
Yea, that the truth be known, the months e'en pass
All unawares, the season but betrays:
It is almost a year he met the lass.

There is no use to dilly-dally now,
For, after all, the truth must e'er prevail.
I am almost ashamed to tell it how
It happened, – but it did, – a funny tale

Again, Loew's translation is not very accurate in terms of the Hungarian original (especially in terms of dividing the text into stanzas); therefore, the verbatim translation is more relevant here.

How it passed, how not,
Nobody knows that,
But that it did pass,
Nobody denies.

And however we dilly-dally,
At last it must be said…
I am almost ashamed to write it down,
A very strange something.

(Sándor Petőfi, *Bolond Istók*, stanzas 160–162)

In the first stanza of the above quotation, the narrator – somewhat similarly to what can be observed in *János vitéz* – steps forward to a certain degree and creates the impression that he does not know how much time has elapsed. Moreover, the text contains several redundant elements, since it is clear from the preceding part that Istók has put flowers in the window of the girl; hence, there is a repeated action implying the passing of hours and days. The next stanza is even more redundant, and as far as its information content is concerned, the last stanza quoted above merely hints at the fact that something has happened. At this point, however, the narrator unquestionably refers to his text as a written text; the creation of the text is simultaneous with the reflection on creation, and the gesture of writing is partly separated from that of utterance inasmuch as the delay in uttering a specific matter does not cause a gap in the writing process. The quotation above is humorous especially because the incident to be described is far from being complex or against the norms, as the narrator acknowledges in the next stanza as well. Thus, his continuing tension in the preceding stanzas is not really justified:

Nagyon egyszerű dolog különben:
A fiú fölszedte holmiját,
S a vándorbottal kezében
Az öreg elébe lép,

S szólt, azaz hogy szólott volna,
S nem tudott, csak szája mozgott,
Elfelejtett
Minden hangot.[39]

---

[39] In William N. Loew's translation (note that the first sentence starts in the previous stanza in Loew's translation, quoted above):

A very simple thing, as a matter of fact:
The boy took his belongings
And with his staff in his hand
He steps before the old man,

And he spoke, or actually he would have spoken,
And he could not, only his mought moved,
He forgot
All sounds.

(Sándor Petőfi, *Bolond Istók*, stanzas 163–164)

Hence, the text becomes playful and reflexive in terms of narration, although this does not affect narrative structure as a whole. In this sense, an interplay between utterance and the lack of utterance is at hand (see also stanza 176). Yet this is only temporary since the narrator essentially does not withhold any piece information without which the reader would be disadvantaged: it is not an instance of the narrator taking advantage of his dominant position but rather a way of creating and maintaining tension.

5.4.3 A narrator using identificational language

The least reflexive of the narrative poems of Petőfi discussed here is *Az apostol* [The Apostle], which contains several rhetorical questions; however, neither the figure of the reader (or listener) nor that of the narrator appears. There are many questions in a row of this sort at the end of Canto IV (this time not targeting smaller details but straightforwardly directed at the unnamed male protagonist), and the narrator uses the first person singular:

Ki vagy? kitől van származásod?
Büszkén neveznek-e szülőid
Fioknak vagy szégyenre gyúlad arcok

It is, still a most natural event. – – –
Picked up his odds and ends and staff in hand
Before his greyhead host quietly went
To say something to him he long had planned.

He never said what he had wished to say,
As if he all at once had mute become,
Stood silent, not by speech could he convey
Why to his greyhead host he thus had come.

Nevednek hallatára?
Min születél? ponyván vagy bársonyon?
Elmondjam a történetet,
E férfi életét?
Elmondom azt… ha festeném,
Ugy festeném le, mint egy patakot,
Mely ismeretlen sziklából fakad, mely
Sötét szük völgyön tör keresztül,
Hol károgó hollók tanyáznak,
Minden nyomon egy kőbe botlik,
S örök fájdalmat nyögnek habjai.[40]

Who are you? from who is your ancestry?
Are your parents proud
To call you their son or do their faces blush in shame
When they hear your name?
On what were you born? on canvas or on velvet?
Should I tell the story,
The life of this man?
I will tell it… if I were to paint it,
I would paint it as a rivulet
Which originates in an unknown rock, which
Breaks through a dark, narrow valley
Where cawing ravens dwell,
Where it hits a stone in every trace
And whose foams roar of eternal pain.

(Sándor Petőfi, *Az apostol*, Canto IV, lines 25–38)

---

[40] In William N. Loew's translation:

Who art thou? Knowest them who gave thee birth?
Are they, thy parents, proud to hear thy name
Or causeth it their face to burn with shame?
Tell us, where wert thou born? On velvet couch,
Or in a manger, on a heap of straw?
Shall I the story of his life now tell?
I will; but if I were to paint the same
I would describe it as a brook, which sprang
From unknown rock where croaking ravens dwell.
At every inch it flows o'er rock and stone,
Its murmur is the groan of constant pain.

The questions raised here are definitely not the narrator's in the sense that he obviously knows the answers (and he does not even create the impression that he is an observer of ongoing events). However, the questions a hypothetical reader may ask are not associated with a specific idea of the reader, and apart from merely showing and answering the questions, the narrator does not enter into a dialogue with the reader. In other words, the questions are designed to be ones that the narrator wishes to answer, since they foster the unfolding of his composition.

The reference to the process of writing is partial also at the point where the hero (Szilveszter) and his wife find their younger son dead one morning:

Ha jobbkezének erejét
Az én kezembe öntené az isten,
Leírhatnám-e úgy is azt a kínt,
Mely a szegény asszony szivét
Ezer körömmel szaggatá?[41]

If god poured the strength of his right arm
Into my arm,
Could I then describe the pain
That tore the pour woman's
Heart with thousand claws?

(Sándor Petőfi, *Az apostol*, Canto XV, lines 21–25)

The word *describe* (Hungarian: *leír*) does not necessarily imply a written form but refers merely to the (possibility of) linguistic expression of the given problem (parents losing their child). At the same time, the picture provided in the first two lines unambiguously refers to an instance of writing, since the narrator's hand is thought to be equipped with or not to be equipped with the power and ability necessary for linguistic expression. In sum, however, the narrator is interesting only in his quality as a poet, as a mediator between story and reader; hence, there is no personal stepping forward or digression to be taken into account.

At the same time, the continuation of the scene contains an instance of addressing a group that is not identified:

[41] In William N. Loew's translation:
If God endowed me with his right hand's force
Not e'en then might I tell the agony
Which by a thousand claws' most cruel hurts
Made that poor mother's heart profusely bleed?

Hagyjátok őt a holttetemre
Borulva sírni, sírni, sírni,
Zokogni, fölüvölteni,
A fájdalomnak mély örvényiből
A magas égre fölkiáltani,
S az isten arcát káromlással, a
Lélek sarával meghajítani!…
Hagyjátok őt, hagyjátok őt,
Ne bántsátok szent őrjöngésiben.[42]

Let her cry, cry, cry
Throwing herself upon the corpse,
Weep, scream,
Shout up to the high heaven
From the deep whirlpools of pain,
And throw curses and the filth of the soul
At the face of god!…
Let her, let her,
Do not hurt her in her sacred ravings.

(Sándor Petőfi, *Az apostol*, Canto XV, lines 26–34)

Defending the character is similar to what was observed in *Bolond Istók* [Simple Steve] as well (stanzas 155–156, see the analysis above). There is, however, one important difference: while in the case of *Bolond Istók*, it is not clear whether the narrator addreses the readers or some unnamed characters of the story (who may in fact mock Istók), in the situation quoted from *Az apostol*, there is no character who could accuse the mother. Therefore, the gesture is unambiguously directed at the readers; however, the narrator, somewhat paradoxically, starts defending the mother even before anyone could denounce her for her frenzy, since the preceding part of the text tells only that the mother is tormented by the death of her child but not how she expresses this. That

42 In William N. Loew's translation:

Leave her alone, leave her to throw herself
Upon the lifeless corpse, to moan, to weep,
From her deep sorrow's deep abyss to heaven
To call, her God with cruelty to charge,
Prostrate herself and deprecate His wrath,
Leave her alone, do not attempt to stop
The wildest outburst of her insane grief.

is, the way the relevant piece of information reaches the reader is embedded in the narrator's speech of defence, thereby essentially excluding the possibility for the reader to react substantially. At the same time, providing an impetuous answer to the purported reactions of the reading audience is not alien to the verse novel (for instance, it is quite frequent in Byron's work; see Chapter 3). Yet, in the case of *Az apostol* neither the narrator nor the addressee is specified; hence, the exclamation remains rather a rhetorical device, apart from the obvious difference that the exclamation in question cannot be regarded as playful and/or comical.

In sum, *Az apostol* contains only very few reflexive narrative gestures, even fewer than *János vitéz* [Childe John] and *Bolond Istók*; furthermore, the existing few reflections do not constitute a system in any of the three texts in the way it can be observed in verse novels. In this sense, Petőfi's narrative poetry, just like the relevant texts of Sándor Kisfaludy and Mihály Vörösmarty, can be regarded as an antecedent for the verse novel primarily in the sense that it facilitated its establishment within an existing literary tradition, while it did not significantly contribute to the actual appearance of the genre. This effect in Petőfi's case can primarily be identified in the tone and the playfulness of his texts, while in the case of Kisfaludy and Vörösmarty rather the narrator's subjectivity has to be highlighted. Considering all this, it is true that the Hungarian verse novel had important internal antecedents in epic poetry from a narratological perspective as well. At the same time, it is clear that these antecedents, together with the fact that mock epic tradition did not have a sufficiently central position, would not have been able to trigger the appearance and (in the 1870s) the fast spread of the verse novel. Hence, the availability of Pushkin's verse novel, primarily through Bérczy's translation, was indeed a crucial factor in the history of the genre.



The afterlife of the verse novel

In the last chapter of the dissertation, I will address the afterlife of the verse novel; that is, the question of its fate after its 19th-century appearance. Of course, this question is (again) far greater than one could investigate truly in detail, examining all its aspects. Concerning the Hungarian verse novel, it can be established that the genre is characteristic primarily of the second half of the 19th century, and the number of examples constantly reduces at the beginning of the 20th century; moreover, these later examples are further and further away from prototypical verse novels. In most of the 20th century, no verse novels appear, even though some works belonging to narrative poetry show some similarity to the genre. Finally, at the very end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, verse novels – taken in the sense of the definition based on narrative structure – are again attested in Hungarian literature. At the same time, note that verse novels appear in other literatures as well, the most important texts written in English. Hence, it is important to examine what kind of literary tradition contemporary verse novels are based on, how decisive internal antecedents (primarily the 19th-century verse novel) are, and to what extent intercultural relations become significant. In what follows, I will argue that contemporary Hungarian verse novels to a significant degree rely on the 19th-century tradition, namely on its intercultural extension, thus pointing beyond the sum of Hungarian texts only. Most of the generic relationships surface in explicit reflections: contemporary verse novels view the 19th-century verse novel as a generic antecedent and as part of literary tradition. In this sense, the verse novel is not only reflexive on the level of the individual texts but also on a generic level.

6.1 Marginalisation and lyric poetry

As was shown before, the verse novel, taken in the Byronic-Pushkinian sense, is primarily related to the 19th century. The number of examples gradually decreases at the beginning of the 20th century in Hungarian literature; Imre (1990: 6) considers Jenő Dsida's *Tükör előtt* [In Front of the Mirror] from 1936 to be the last prototypical example. In the period to follow, practically until János Térey's *Paulus* [Paulus] from 2001 (cf. Margócsy 2002), no works appear that could be considered verse novels in the Byronic-Pushkinian sense, that it, ones with an appropriate reflexive narrative structure. Still, there are instances of narrative poetry (and partly of narrative prose) that may be especially important in terms of the verse novel, possibly exactly due to their dissimilarity. In this section, I will deal with two texts in this respect, concentrating on the issue of relatedness to lyric poetry: Lőrinc Szabó's Tücsökzene [Cricket Music] from 1945–1957 and Ágnes Nemes Nagy's Három történet [Three Stories] from 1946, 1949 and 1966.

6.1.1 Subjectivity – Lőrinc Szabó

Lőrinc Szabó's *Tücsökzene* is treated already by Imre (1990: 6) as a text that can be potentially regarded as related to the verse novel. Their relation is indeed justifiable inasmuch as *Tücsökzene* is a narrative text written in verse; moreover, the chosen form is that of the sonnet, which evokes the Onegin stanza as well. At the same time, Szabó's work is markedly autobiographical; hence, the reflexive distance of the speaking agent from the events he is narrating is necessarily smaller than what is generally characteristic of verse novels. The occasional digressions of the narrative agent (and/or poetic persona) within the scope of his personal (current) life do not constitute examples of digression or topic shift, since the original topic is likewise his life (and the story thereof). Semi-digressions of this sort may involve reflections on the circumstances of writing, like in sonnet 306, in which the narrator writes about his cat that appears (and walks on the desk) during the process of writing. The importance of this poetic *I* that synthetises everything is reflected on by the narrator at the end of the first part of the text:

> Táj épül, omlik, gyúl, gőz-síp hasít
> a tücskös éjbe, fátyolbimbait
> bontja bodor füst, s hold, ezüst virág,
> nyíl a felhők közt, arc, más arcon át,
> jön, itt van, már nincs, erdők, városok
> örvénye forgat: én magam vagyok
> a kép s a keret, s évek, negyvenöt,
> lobognak körűl, s mindegyik mögött
> ott a többi, ott cirpel, ami csak
> enyém volt, vágy, vagy boldog pillanat,
> minden elérhetetlen messzeség,
> minden kétségbeejtő veszteség,
> mind, ami voltam, pénz és szerelem
> és halálvágy, és ami sohasem,
> az is, kétely, játék és képzelet,
> a zűrzavar, amit most rendezek,
> hogy értsem magam s hogy megértsetek:
> örök véget és örök kezdetet.
>
> *A landscape emerges, crashes, inflames, a steam-whistle cuts*
> *into the night of crickets, the curly smoke*

opens its veil-buds, and the moon, a silver flower,
appears among the clouds, a face, through another face,
comes, it is here, it is no more, the whirlpool of
forests, cities spin me: I myself am
the picture and the frame, and years, forty-five,
flutter around me, and behind each one
there are the others, there chirps all that
was mine, desires and happy moments,
all unreachable distances,
all hopeless losses,
all that I was, money and love
and longing for death, and what I never was,
that too, doubts, games and imagination,
the confusion I am creating now
to understand myself and for you to understand me:
me, the eternal end and eternal beginning.

(Lőrinc Szabó, *Tücsökzene*, 7: Táj épül, omlik [A landscape emerges, crashes])

In this sense, for the narrator, the purpose of the text is to understand himself, and the reader is given the opportunity to get an insight into this closed process, which is supposed to be going on between the self as the agentive subject and the self as the examined object. However, this also implies that any other topic independent of the narrator's person would be a distractor, inasmuch as it would interrupt the operation of the closed system. Hence, the narrative structure known from verse novels is not only reversed here, as is the case in Endre Ady's *Margita élni akar* [Margita Wants to Live], but it is totally inverted and becomes impossible due to the pregivenness of the text's self-centredness. This self-centredness, together with the verse form (and the division of the text into sonnets with individual titles) moves the whole of *Tücsökzene* into the direction of lyric poetry. At the same time, the text is not merely a sonnet cycle precisely because there is a narrative thread; moreover, the individual sonnets are not only placed along this thread, but they are in fact related to one another via direct (and indirect) references. In other words, the individual sonnets not only follow each other chronologically but they are in various logical relationships with one another, as parts of a narrative text.

Further, the sonnets are not merely placed along a line but they form larger units within the entire text: these are numbered and have their own titles and they specify the exact time of the given stage of life – for instance, *III.: Balassagyarmat: Idillek az Ipoly körül. 1905–1908* [III: Balassagyarmat: Idylls around the Ipoly. 1905–

1908]. These units do not have a specific category designator (such as part, chapter, and canto) but they are definitely larger units reminiscent of narrative poetry and partially also narrative-like song cycles (regarding the latter, see the discussion concerning the song cycles of Sándor Kisfaludy in Chapter 5). It appears that the boundaries between these units are visible for the narrator as well; at the end of the second unit, there is the following:

Hajnalodik. Megyek aludni. Dzsesz
a zenétek, tücskeim! Csakhogy ez,
a bennem szóló, az emlékeké,
mely szétcsap a négy világtáj felé,
még gyorsabb! és túlzeng benneteket!
Jó mulatást! Isteni kedvetek
csak elkezdte az ős varázslatot:
a többi már maga jött: itt suhog
köröttem minden boldog éjszaka:
gyűlnek az árnyak, örök muzsika
hozza, kíséri őket, s mennyi év,
mennyi táj, mennyi drága, régi kép
vágyik még megszületni: Debrecen,
Balassagyarmat Budának üzen,
Tiszabecs kérdez, Egyiptom felel,
Splitet a Tátra szivemben éri el:
életem beszél, s ahogy hallgatom,
mondom, amit mond. Holnap folytatom.

It is dawning. I am going to sleep. Your music
is jazz, my crickets! However, this one,
the one sounding in me, that of the memories,
which spreads in the four cardinal directions,
is even faster! and it is louder than you!
Have fun! Your divine mood
only started the ancient magic:
the rest came by itself: all blissful nights
are swishing around me here:
the shades are gathering, eternal music
brings, accompanies them, and how many years,
how many landscapes, how many dear, old pictures

desire yet to be born: Debrecen,
Balassagyarmat send messages to Buda,
Tiszabecs asks, Egypt answers,
the Tatras reach Split in my heart:
my life is talking, and as I am listening to it,
I say what it says. I will continue tomorrow.

(Lőrinc Szabó, *Tücsökzene*, 29: Közjáték: a tücskökhöz [Intermezzo to the crickets])

The caesura occurring in the process of narration coincides with the caesura in the composition, similar to verse novels, in that the interruption of narration and the line of thoughts is essentially arbitrary. At the same time, composition is rounded off, and overall, it does not create the impression that the narrator would act against the logic of narrating the story or against the expectations of the reader. Moreover, the gesture of narration is inherently tied to the presence of cricket music, as also indicated by the way the entire text is framed. Hence, there is an a priori situation delimiting narration in which the event of interruption is inherently encoded (the cricket music diminishes at dawn, which coincides with the end of the critical period of reminiscence and narration).

Although the quotation above suggests that the narrator tells his life story in a direct way in the sense that he merely pours his memories into a poetic form, at other points of the text, he acknowledges that the produced text is strictly composed. This can be observed in sonnet 157 (and to a lesser extent in sonnets 153, 163, and 179 as well):

De ne higyjétek, hogy amit ma itt
elmesélek, mindig volt, s mindig így:
állandóan! Heteket, éveket
tol össze a vers, s az emlékezet
olyan percekre veti sugarát,
amelyek kiugranak. Óh, tovább,
sokkal tovább – s tán mindig – csak gyerek
világa volt még s tán máig se lett
egyéb az a szív s az a tükrös ész,
mit a véletlen jelenetezés
hol itt villant meg, hol amott. Csak a
mozgása hű s az összkép színpada:
mert hogy mondjak el mindent, napra nap

hány szál szövődött és mennyi szakadt,
s ami pezsdűlt, hogy ült nyomtalan el,
s búvópatakként hogy tört újra fel?
A szín forog, és amit elhagyok,
egészítse ki a ti álmotok.

But do not believe that what I tell here
today was always there and always this way:
constantly! The poem slides together
weeks and years, and reminiscence
casts its beams on moments
that pop out. Oh, further,
much further – and perhaps always – it was still only
a child's world and perhaps it is nothing else even today,
that heart and that mirroring mind
that the random sort of scenery
highlights sometimes here, sometimes there. Only its
movement is faithful and the stage of the overall picture:
for how should I tell everything, how many threads were woven
and how many torn from day to day,
and how what was fizzing subsided without a trace,
and how it gushed out again as an underground stream?
The scene changes, and what I leave out
should be completed by your dreams.

(Lőrinc Szabó, *Tücsökzene*, 157: Gyerekvilág [Child's World])

The problem of reconstructing the past is not merely a problem of reminiscence but also a necessary consequence of text formation: verse form compresses the narrator's thoughts; hence, certain details are left out and the elapsed time between the individual moments is left unspecified. According to the quotation above, filling these gaps is the task of the reader, thus the narrator considers the reader to be an active contributor to (and to some extent an author of) the text as well, although the playing field of the reader is naturally narrowed down by the structure created by the narrator. The elements of the past emerging in the text appear as results of a "random sort of scenery". What is depicted depends partly on the haphazard nature of reminiscence and partly on the narrator's arbitrariness, which is in line with the macrostructure of *Tücsökzene*, whereby the individual pieces of recollection related to one another constitute a sequence that can be considered a narrative, too. However, there is no macro-

narrative to trigger a reverse influence on the individual smaller units and to make certain details superfluous or omissible from its perspective.

The haphazard and arbitrary nature of composition is of course related to the egocentric quality of the text discussed above: moreover, this kind of egocentrism blurs the boundaries not only between the narrator and the hero but also between the narrator and the biographic author (in sonnets 185 and 221, for instance, the narrator refers to himself as Lőrinc Szabó). This network of connections is similar to what was observed in *Childe Harold* (see the discussion in Chapter 3). Yet this structure is not exploited in a playful way since the text argues for the identity of the three characters, while alienating gestures have a central role in the case of *Child Harold* especially in terms of the relationship between the narrator and Harold. By contrast, due to the first person of the narrator, the structure of *Tücsökzene* makes a similar setup inherently impossible.

In sum, the text of *Tücsökzene* shows similarities to the genre of the verse novel; however, the entire narrative structure of prototypical verse novels, together with an increased reflexivity, cannot be detected, primarily due to the difference in the composition centred on the narrator's first person.

6.1.2 Objectivity – Ágnes Nemes Nagy

Divergences of another kind can be observed in Ágnes Nemes Nagy's cycle *Három történet* [Three Stories]: in this case, there are actually three different texts, which, however, the author consistently arranged as parts of a cycle in volumes of her collected works (see Honti 2000). Shared properties of the three texts include the increased degree of a personal tone which alternates with distancing gestures, and the embeddedness of the narrative in a strongly lyrical text. Moreover, the third text, *Ház a hegyoldalban* [House on the Hillside] is written in a dialogical form, whereby the two characters, the guide and the visitor alternate in being assigned longer parts of the text. These are to some extent narrative in nature; yet the absence of a narrator in a strict sense makes it impossible to consider the text as an instance of epic poetry, and it shows no resemblance to the kind of narrative examined in the present dissertation.

The first text, entitled *Elégia egy fogolyról* [Elegy on a Prisoner], starts with the visual displaying of the speaker and the addressee:

A régi kert nem volt kalandos.
Ápolt füvén a szín kihűlt,
az út: az út, a fa: a lombos,
nemen kivül, koron kivül.

S a síma út ívén szünetlen
két nyílvessző feszítve: ketten.

The old garden was not adventurous.
The colour has cooled down on its well-groomed grass,
the road: the road, the tree: the leafy one,
out of genus, out of age.
And on the arc of the smooth road two arrows
Ceaselessly strained: the two of us.

(Ágnes Nemes Nagy, *Három történet: Elégia egy fogolyról*, stanza 1)

Hence, the text starts with a description of the scenery, which is of course personal inasmuch as it is obviously related to the two characters' own childhood, and these characters – the narrator and her childhood (female) friend, the prisoner referred to in the title – appear metaphorically embedded in this scenery. The narrative is essentially as follows: on the one hand, the two characters emerge from the scenery in a stepwise fashion (this can be observed already in the subsequent stanzas); on the other hand, the narrator and the addressee are gradually separated from each other. The process of detachment from the garden is part of the detachment from childhood:

Nem olvadtunk a kertbe mégsem.
Maradtunk növekvő, kemény
magzat az édes anyaméhben,
növelt a fű, formált a fény,
mig egy nap a kavicsra dűlve
testünket a világba szülte.

Yet we did not melt into the garden.
We remained growing, hard
foetuses in the sweet motherly womb,
we were grown by the grass, we were formed by the light,
till one day, leaning on pebbles
it bore our bodies into the world.

(Ágnes Nemes Nagy, *Három történet: Elégia egy fogolyról*, stanza 8)

The instance of the second birth (entering adulthood as being born into the world) is basically natural, while the separation of the two characters is largely not: the narrator's friend is imprisoned in Márianosztra and is later deported:

> – Téged aztán nyugatra vittek. –
> Ruganyos tested, szép agyad,
> zöldes félholdja szemeidnek,
> kezed valami könyv alatt,
> s a tüdővész, a jég, a kamra –
> igazságom! Ne hagyj magamra!
>
> *– You were then taken to the West. –*
> *Your lithe body, your beautiful brain,*
> *the greenish half-moons of your eyes,*
> *your hands under some book,*
> *and the tuberculosis, the ice, the chamber –*
> *my justice! Do not leave me alone!*
>
> (Ágnes Nemes Nagy, *Három történet: Elégia egy fogolyról*, stanza 23)

The narrative of separation starts with a quasi-identical unity and ends with the greatest possible difference (alive and dead). The text necessarily ends at a point where the merging of the two characters' fates is no longer possible. This distance between the two characters, which can also be reflected on, emerges gradually from the quasi-identical unity up until the endpoint; neither the dynamics of this change is reflected on, nor is its textual presentation thematised. In this way, narration is embedded in a highly lyrical text.

The second text entitled *Mihályfalvi kaland* [An Adventure in Mihályfalva] is considerably closer to the genre of the verse novel; its subtitle *Részlet egy elbeszélő költeményből* [Fragment from a Narrative Poem] indicates that the text has a narrative character and that it is a fragment. The versions published in Nemes Nagy's lifetime include two cantos; there are two additional cantos written by her, which were added to the digital edition compiled by Balázs Lengyel.[43] The additional cantos essentially provide descriptions of the scenery, which are for the most part reminiscent of Nemes Nagy's lyrical poetry, even though there are some ironic stanzas. The

[43] The electronic edition is available at "Digitális Irodalmi Akadémia" (DIA) 'Digital Literary Academy'. The two additional cantos were added to the beginning. In the quotations used in the present dissertation I rely on the 2003 printed edition; hence, what is referred to as Canto I here translates as Canto III in the electronic edition (the stanza numbering is identical).

scenery is also important in terms of the characters, who emerge from the scenery in a similar way to what we observed in the case of *Elégia egy fogolyról*. Yet they remain unspecified: what we know is that the narrator and Balázs are a couple in love, and that Balázs is a soldier.

Just like the additional cantos, the two cantos published in Nemes Nagy's lifetime are characterised by a strong presence of picture-like descriptions, and apart from the escape described in the second (last) canto, the depicted events constitute static scenes. The character of Balázs is described in more detail in the first of these published cantos when the narrator says the following:

A fűzfaágy, szalmával tömött bárka,
(Danila fonta) csendesen zizeg,
napraforgó az asztalon, pohárban,
hat könyv, lavor, és fülledő meleg.
Katonaszagú zubbonyod ledobtad.
Ne gyujts világot. Nézd inkább a holdat.
Érembe-metszi fiatal fejed.

S az ezüst-érem felirata: ifjú,
a Dráva mellett, negyvennégy nyarán.
Háromhónapos házas. Vékonyarcú.
Borbély keze rég nem járt a haján.
S a fiatalság olyan gyönge rajta,
mint gyönge száron ritka rózsa-fajta –
katona. Méláz. Tájon, szón, hazán.

The willow bed, an ark filled with straw,
(Danila made it) is rustling quietly,
sunflowers on the table, in a glass,
six books, a washbasin, and stifling heat.
You have thrown off your jacket that smells like a soldier.
Do not turn on the light. Look at the moon rather.
It carves your young head into a medal.

And the inscription on the medal: young man,
At the Drava, in the summer of '44.
Married for three months. Thin-faced.
His hair has not been touched by a barber for a while.
And youth is as weak on him

as a rare rose on a weak stalk –
a soldier. He is musing. On scenery, on words, on fatherland.

(Ágnes Nemes Nagy, *Három történet: Mihályfalvi kaland*, Canto I, stanzas 8–9)

The description of the man, the hint that they are married and the indication of the place and the year are all centred on a single image, which is based on the similarity between the given sight (the moon and the man) and coins. It seems that providing pieces of information within the text is possible only if they can be written into or onto an image, while the self-evident nature of describing the basic situation of the narrated story is missing.

The strong imagery is retained even when the memories appear in their relation to the present, to the given speech act:

(Csodálkozol: ilyen kis pillanat,
e régi pénzt, ha kiásod a földből,
hogy megmaradt, ezernyi év alatt,
miközben már az iszonyat csörömpölt.
Kár volna mégis meg nem fényesítni:
nekünk, hiába, mégis ez jutott ki
az ifjúságból és a szerelemből.)

(You wonder: such a little moment,
this old money, if you dig it out from the ground,
that it survived, for a thousand of years,
while the horror was already clattering.
Yet it would be a pity not to polish it:
for us, let's face it, this was given
from youth and from love.)

(Ágnes Nemes Nagy, *Három történet: Mihályfalvi kaland*, Canto I, stanza 10)

At the same time, it is clear from the quotation above that the narrated time and the time of narration are far away from each other, as indicated by the expression "*a thousand of years*" (Hungarian: "*ezernyi év*"), and both youth and love belong to the past. However, it is not clear exactly how much time has passed, nor is the relationship between the narrator and the addressee in the present. The text stays in the domain of lyric poetry in this respect as well, since while it establishes a contrast between the past and the present, it does not aim at drawing the narrative between

the two; partly because of this, temporality arises only insofar as there is a difference that can be expressed via an image.

In sum, the texts of Ágnes Nemes Nagy tend towards lyric poetry. This tendency is, however, different from what can be observed in Lőrinc Szabó's *Tücsökzene*. The move in the case of Lőrinc Szabó is primarily caused by the predominant ego of the narrator and thus by an increased amount of subjectivity. By contrast, in the texts of Ágnes Nemes Nagy, the move can rather be attributed to the backgrounding of the narrator and the foregrounding of imagery, which is why there is a certain amount of objective distancing. Nevertheless, both ways of divergence from the preceding forms of epic poetry (including that of the verse novel) are manifestations of features generally characteristic of the poetry of Lőrinc Szabó and that of Ágnes Nemes Nagy.

6.2 A modern mock epic – Ferenc Juhász

Apart from Lőrinc Szabó and Ágnes Nemes Nagy, Ferenc Juhász must also be mentioned as an important poet in terms of the afterlife of the verse novel in the middle of the 20th century. His mock epic *A jégvirág kakasa* [The Rooster of the Frostwork] from 1951 is markedly different from the ones discussed in the previous section. Ferenc Juhász considered it to be a mock epic, the genre indicating that the work is not only marginally related to epic poetry. In section 6.2.1, I will discuss the relation of the text to the mock epic genre and its dialogical nature, while section 6.2.2 is dedicated to the specific issue of the narrator reflecting on the process of writing, a property generally closer to the verse novel than to the mock epic.

6.2.1 The role of the modern epic poet

The mottos in the text are taken from Sándor Petőfi's mock epic *A helység kalapácsa* [The Hammer of the Village]; they are specifically ones where the narrator addresses his audience directly and are hence of particular importance from a narratological perspective (see Chapter 4 for a detailed analysis). The text is divided into nine cantos, each of them introduced by a short, mostly humorous summary: a similar phenomenon can be observed in Mihály Csokonai Vitéz's *Dorottya* [Dorottya] as well. However, these summaries are not only dedicated to the content of the text but in certain cases also to its formal properties: for instance, the summary of Canto I indicates that Canto I is short and essentially contains only an invocation. The invocation is reminiscent of Csokonai's mock epics:

Hol is kezdjem hát történetem? De
tán innék előbb, hisz
hosszúra nyúlik beszédem, mint
a nyári napok, s kibírná
egy becsületes férfi száraz torokkal
a tikkasztó melegben csak egy napig is?

Where shall I start my story, then? But
maybe I should drink first, since
my speech will be long as
summer days, and would
an honest man stick it out with a dry throat
in the sultry heat, even if just for one day?

(Ferenc Juhász, *A jégvirág kakasa*, Canto I, lines 1–6)

Drinking as an incentive for poetic activity can be found at the beginning of *Dorottya* as well. In the subsequent part of the text, it is complemented by the action of smoking (lines 43–45), invoking the beginning of Csokonai's *Békaegérharc* [Battle of Frogs and Mice] entitled *Felfohászkodás* [Invocation], with the difference that Ferenc Juhász refers to cigarettes (and not to a pipe) in the text. The proposition of the topic, embedded in the frame set by drinking and smoking, is not specific; however, it is highly ironic:

Nekem pedig boldogabb, szabad
életünkről kell zengeni most,
gyönyörű dalt, tanúságúl
jövendő koroknak, hogy ükunokáim,
ha megérem azt az időt,
s mint az őszi bogyók, levelek,
ráncba zsugorodva, töpörödve,
megfáradt karral ülök a nap sugarában,
s az álmos őszi legyek dongását
hallgatom,
mondom, ha majd a világ
minden népe szabad lesz,
s a kommunizmus emberi fényében fürdik
a föld,
ükunokáim akkor, vigyázva, hogy

arcomra
árnyékot ne vessen
a testük;
azt mondják nekem: „Öreg,
éneked most is teljes fényében ragyog,
s mulatságúl szolgál, s meséd
igazsága igazunk ma is."

And I must now sing about our
happier, freer life,
a beautiful song, as a testimony
to future ages, so that my great-great-grandchildren,
if I live to see that time,
and like autumn berries and leaves,
shrinking into wrinkles, desiccating,
I sit with tired arms in the sun's beams,
and I listen to the humming of
sleepy autumn flies,
as I said, if all the peoples of the world
are free,
and the earth
bathes in the human light of communism,
then my great-great-grandchildren, carefully, so that
their bodies
should not cast a shadow
on my face;
they will say to me: "Old man,
your song is still shining in its full blaze,
and is entertaining, and the truth
of your tale is still our truth today."

(Ferenc Juhász, *A jégvirág kakasa*, Canto I, lines 7–28)

The narrator ironically identifies his role as a poet with that of a prophet. On the one hand, this is in conflict with the picture he creates of himself in the preceding and subsequent lines. On the other hand, it is not entirely clear what he is going to sing about exactly, while it is meticulously pointed out that his song must be worthy of the prospective world peace; this presentation is highly ironic also because of the

figure of the poet. The introductory part anticipates the irony characteristic of the text in terms of the presented world (the period of socialism, communist ideas and their realisation). The picture of the narrating situation presented in this part also sets a frame around the narrated story: Canto IX closes the composition, and the narrator again presents himself in a featured position of a poet, accompanied by the returning gestures of drinking and smoking.

The narrator's presence is often dominant in the whole text, even though the kind of self-presentation attested in Canto I and the way the reader is addressed directly are not continued in their entirety. Moreover, the figure of the reader and the written nature of the text in the quotation above are dissolved in the traditional picture of the relationship between the minstrel-poet and his audience. However, there are examples of remarks that are stronger than mere exclamations and rhetorical questions; for instance, in Canto II, the narrator presents Ferkó Török as a shy young man. Hence, he adds the following:

Mit tegyünk most e szemérmes
legénnyel, hova bújjunk
szégyenünkben, mi,
az asszonyok perzselő
pillantását bátran kiálló
férfiak?
Ferkónk feszeng, izgúl, mint
a robbanni készülő rakéta,
hogy sisteregve
elfüstölögjön.

What shall we do now with this shy
lad, where shall we hide
in our shame, we
men,
who so boldly bear the scorching
glances of women?
Our Ferkó is ill at ease, he jitters as
a rocket about to explode,
so as to smoulder
sizzling.

(Ferenc Juhász, *A jégvirág kakasa*, Canto II, lines 215–224)

Here, the narrator is evidently part of the group of men he refers to, and since the question is directed outwards, it seems that the narrator assumes that there are members of the same group among the readers as well (which naturally does not mean that the group only consists of these individuals). The use of a question and the closeness to spoken language makes the text dialogical at this point; however, this dialogue is only partly continued in lines 225–237, and it is interrupted afterwards. Moreover, the figure of the reader is not specified, and there are no references to the written, mediated nature of the text either. The fellowship between the narrator and the reader is strengthened by the designation "*our Ferkó*" (Hungarian: "*Ferkónk*"), which occurs in precedent and subsequent parts of the text, too.

However, the first person plural does not necessarily mean that the reader is involved: it may refer to the narrator only (see, for instance, Canto II, lines 286–300). Hence, the first person plural as concerning shared views between the narrator and the reader is questioned more generally as well, and such gestures are examples of rhetorical games rather than of narratological ones. This becomes obvious in Canto II when the narrator describes how Ferkó wakes up in the morning to find Katalin next to him in bed:

> Te, e versek olvasója, ne
> mulass ismét jámbor
> barátunkon, azt se hidd,
> hogy vele valami csoda
> esett.
> Csodák hívői, s hirdetői
> nem vagyunk mi,
> sem égi jelek, bódító csillag-képletek
> jegyesei!
>
> *You, the reader of these verses, do not*
> *laugh again at out simple*
> *friend, do not believe either*
> *that some miracle happened*
> *to him.*
> *We are not believers and preachers*
> *of miracles,*
> *nor are we engaged*
> *to celestial signs and narcotic stellar constellations.*
>
> (Ferenc Juhász, *A jégvirág kakasa*, Canto III, lines 51–59)

Of course, predicting the reaction of the reader and providing a (necessarily opposing) reaction are known from the verse novel; however, the reader is not specified and the narrator becomes impersonal due to the use of the plural form, especially when compared to his almost tangible appearance in Canto I. At the same time, the explanation for Katalin's presence is given considerably later in the canto (see from line 386 onwards), and the narrator also indicates that Ferkó's long sleep was necessary only because this way, the narrator had the chance to relate other matters; hence, it is essentially a case of poetic licence. A similar phenomenon can be observed in Canto VII (lines 170–198); however, the reader's reaction gains linguistic presence there, and the reaction the narrator considers ideal (drinking and smoking) is also identifiable.

The quotation above not only reflects on the diegetic level of the text but partly also on the extradiegetic level, in that a sort of arc poetica is formulated there. Reflections on the extradiegetic level may target the linguistic properties of the text, as in the quotation below, where the narrator describes how the priest's anger fades:

> Ám haragja úgy szétpattan, mint
> ez a sokszor használt hasonlat,
> amikor
> Kocsis Bözsi
> tolja be gyönyörű
> termetét az ajtón.
> Kezében jácint-csokor, s iszonyú
> tűz a szemében.
>
> *Yet his anger dies as does*
> *this overused simile,*
> *when*
> *Bözsi Kocsis*
> *pushes her beautiful stature*
> *through the door.*
> *A bouquet of hyacinths in her hands, and a terrible*
> *fire in her eyes.*
>
> (Ferenc Juhász, *A jégvirág kakasa*, Canto III, lines 122–129)

The essence of the language game is that the first element of the simile ("anger dies"; Hungarian *a harag szétpattan*, literally 'anger bursts', bursting in the sense of, e.g., a

bubble, whereby the entity undergoing bursting disappears) is interpreted as the reference value of comparison (the element to be compared to some standard). However, it is clear from the second line of the quotation that the first line in fact contains the standard value as well (anger disappears as if it died suddenly; Hungarian: *a harag úgy múlik el, mintha szétpattanna*, literally 'anger disappears as if it burst, like, e.g., a bubble'). The insertion of the linguistic game naturally prevents the evolvement of the original simile (in which the dying of anger would be compared to the dying of something else); in this sense, the simile dies, while the death of the simile is ultimately a simile, too. Hence, at the given point, the text refers to its own linguistic properties in a very complex way (for a similar gesture, see also e.g. Canto VII, lines 86–94).

6.2.2 The process of writing

In addition to the properties mentioned above, there are some reflections on the process of writing in *A jégvirág kakasa* [The Rooster of the Frostwork], as for instance at the end of Canto III, where the narrator leaves Ferkó's father and Bözsi flirting, and says the following:

> Ám, hagyjuk őket, s fejezzük be
> dalunkat rövidesen.
> Le is raknánk mi a
> tollat
> hamarosan, de Ferkó házassága
> titkát kutatjuk.
>
> *But, let us leave them, and let us end*
> *our song soon.*
> *We would indeed put down*
> *our pen*
> *shortly, but we are researching the secret*
> *of Ferkó's marriage.*
>
> (Ferenc Juhász, *A jégvirág kakasa*, Canto III, lines 509–514)

Suspending the storytelling process at the end of a canto is a frequently attested narratological property in verse novels, which is naturally embedded in a wider context in epic poetry, as was shown in the preceding chapters. However, there is no actual interruption at this point, since the narrator's arbitrariness is subordinated to the

wish to clarify a question related to the story. Hence, arbitrariness is essentially confined to the fact that the narrator drops the piece of information about Ferkó having married Katalin quite unexpectedly. In what follows, he can only write about the wedding, but he does not know how all this actually came to happen either. Viewed in this light, the relevance of the events and situations narrated in detail so far is also questioned, since their relation to the actual marriage remains unclear because even though Ferkó intended to propose to Katalin before the dance (Canto II), none of his actions are successful. However, the appearance of arbitrariness is weakened by the narrator's statement that he does not know the details evidently missing for the reader. This does not reduce the playful character of the text, and it does not create a superposition for the narrator either from which he would be able to dominate the reader effectively.

A similar closing gesture can be observed at the end of Canto IV as well, when the narrator appears to take refuge in sleep from the narrated events; the opening counterpart of this gesture can be found at the beginning of Canto V:

> Lám, mi történt, amíg mi
> aludtunk?
> Az öregebb Töröknek
> megfájdúlt a foga.
>
> *Lo, what happened while we*
> *were asleep?*
> *The elder Török's*
> *tooth started to ache.*
>
> (Ferenc Juhász, *A jégvirág kakasa*, Canto V, lines 1–4)

References to the structuring of the text are analogous to what can be observed in verse novels, inasmuch as the caesuras in between the individual cantos are thematised; note that this property is not alien to mock epics either. Likewise, there are several examples for the differentiation between the events taking place and the events being narrated in the preceding literary tradition (see Chapters 2–4), which can be observed at several points in *A jégvirág kakasa* – see, for instance, Canto V, lines 172–180 and Canto VIII, lines 83–100. On the other hand, linking sleep and the interruption of storytelling can be found at other points of the text, too, possibly even in an internal part of the canto (see, for instance, Canto VIII, lines 490–505).

This kind of interruption can be observed in Canto VI, which is entirely dedicated to describing the narrator's despair over his having neglected the text for quite a while:

De lusta voltam. Lusta
bizony! Öt hónapig sárgulni
hagytam a papírt,
a sarokba vágtam a tollat,
tintám beszáradt,
asztalom a pók tanyája volt.
Most aztán fogom a fejem. Kapkodok
ide-oda, mint kutya
a légy után.

But I have been lazy. Lazy
indeed! I let the paper become yellow
for five months,
I threw the pen into the corner,
my ink dried up,
my desk was the haunt of spiders.
Now I am desperate. I am gasping
here and there, as a dog
for a fly.

(Ferenc Juhász, *A jégvirág kakasa*, Canto VI, lines 13–21)

In this case, the narrator left the text in a way that is not in perfect accordance with the probable expectations of the reader. That is, this particular caesura does not imply that the narrator considered the break necessary for the reader as well (unlike in typical cases of late-night settings where both the narrator and the reader are supposed to go to sleep). The interruption reflected on is arbitrary inasmuch as it can largely be attributed to the narrator's laziness, and it is personal in that Canto VI contains several hints at what the narrator was doing instead of writing. This is an instance of digression, which can be detected at several other points of the text (see, for example, Canto VIII, lines 445–450, where the narrator reflects on a preceding description as an instance of digression).

The personal tone continues until the beginning of Canto VII, where the narrator claims to write the text because he is being threatened by his aunt Zsófia (lines 1–10). More precisely, she threatens the narrator with beating him up with her slippers in case he does not write about the events which follow in the story (and which are presumably unpleasant) – this is of course again an instance of devolving responsibility to a certain degree (and in a playful manner). However, there are also examples in which the narrator apparently refuses to relate certain events (e.g.

Canto VII, lines 575–578). In these cases, it is evident from the parts preceding and especially following his rejection that the non-narrated events have very little importance concerning the whole story. In this way, these gestures are not examples of the narrator withholding information in a dominant way, as opposed to what can often be observed in verse novels.

In other cases, however, the text reflects on the inseparability of writing and the occurrence of certain events: the narrator as a poet is not only forced to write even if he lacks relevant details but also if he cannot withhold pieces of information he has access to. This is exemplified in Canto IV, when Anna Harmat's falling in love is described:

Ó, részegítő szerelem!
Ó, bolondító nyár!
Ó, szerencsétlen költő!
Minek is idézte bolond tollad
ezt a történetet!
Minek is szegődtél Ámor
vesszőhordozójának?
Te, aki előre látsz már az idők
szövedékén,
miért nem vágtad tollad
az asztalba, hogy
hegye szétnyíljon, mint a
fecskefarok!
Átkozd ostoba fejedet, döngesd
konok koponyádat dühös
öklöllel!
Mert percegő tolladból
most menthetetlenűl
megszületik
a tragédia!

Oh, intoxicating love!
Oh, crazing summer!
Oh, miserable poet!
Why your foolish pen has
summoned this story at all!
Why did you join Amor to be

his carrier of arrows?
You, who can already see through the fabric of times
into the future,
why didn't you throw your pen
against the desk, so that
its point split like a
swallow-tail!
Curse your stupid head, bang
on your stubborn skull with angry
fists!
For now from your scratching pen
unwarrantably
tragedy
will be born!

(Ferenc Juhász, *A jégvirág kakasa*, Canto IV, lines 206–225)

As opposed to the first person plural described above, the narrator again steps forward in a personal way (just like in Canto I) and unambiguously presents himself as the author of the text. Moreover, as an author, he is not merely responsible for writing down the events of the story: the poet has responsibility as well, inasmuch as he induces certain incidents by writing about certain details. This is of course true and lies in the nature of the text, since access to the given world is possible only through the text, thus whatever the narrator does not communicate did not happen from the reader's viewpoint. In this sense, the quotation above is a comical definition of the poet's/author's competence. This line of thoughts continues further, and responsibility oscillates between the narrator and the character (Anna Harmat, in the quotation referred to by the diminutive forms Annus and Annuska):

Ó, kicsi Harmat Annus!
Akinek az ártatlanság szelíd
bogyója a szeme,
mint a harmattól hamvas kökény.
Miért kerültél
tollam elébe?
Mert toll van a te kezedben is!
Bolond poéta; tedd hát
a Parancs szerint.
Szólj, s engedd láttatni őket,

de magad ne mutatkozz!
Fölcsapom hát a varázslat
köd-süvegét
kobakomra,
vállamra kanyarítom
pára-subámat, s hopp! – már
pára-semmivé
foszlott alakom,
mint a nap sugarától a vízcsöpp.
S Annuska háta mögűl
kukkantok
a papirosra.

Oh, little Annus Harmat!
Whose eyes are the
meek berries of innocence,
like blackthorns downy from dew.
Why did you get into
the way of my pen?
Because you have a pen in your hand, too!
Foolish poet; follow
then the Command.
Speak, and let them be seen,
but do not show yourself!
I will then put the fog-cap
of magic
on my head,
I will throw my vapour-coat
over my shoulder, and lo! – my
shape has already ravelled
into vapour-naught,
as a water-drop does from the sun's rays.
And I can peep
at the paper
from behind Annuska's back.

(Ferenc Juhász, *A jégvirág kakasa*, Canto IV, lines 266–287)

In this way, the character partly becomes the victim of the poet. Yet the narrator immediately denies responsibility, in that he argues that he is merely a reporter of the events and that Anna Harmat is not a victim exactly because she is also a creator of a text and, as such, an active agent shaping certain events. Playfulness, hence, primarily lies in that sometimes the narrator presents himself as an author inventing the story and at other times as a witness of the events merely reporting these without making himself seen; additionally, he can arbitrarily change from one role to the other any time. The text written by Anna Harmat is a love letter to Ferkó, who is already married at this point: the narrator sometimes refers to this in a way that foreshadows a tragic outcome, while at other times he treats this as a comical element inasmuch as Anna Harmat is only a teenager. At any rate, the narrator is helpless against the events (see also Canto V, lines 349–363 for a similar conclusion):

> Neked is, szószátyár
> költő;
> mit ér a szavad itt?
> Szólj neki, világosítsd föl
> ártatlan elméjét
> a csöppségnek!
> De mit tehetnék?
> Köd-köpönyegem tőle eltakar,
> s szerelmes vagyok magam is.
> Szerelmes bizony!
>
> *You too, prattling*
> *poet,*
> *what does your word count here?*
> *Speak to her, enlighten the*
> *innocent brain*
> *of the tiny tot!*
> *But what could I do?*
> *My fog-coat hides me from her,*
> *and I am in love myself.*
> *In love indeed!*
>
> (Ferenc Juhász, *A jégvirág kakasa*, Canto IV, lines 396–405)

The narrator addresses himself (it is not clear in whose name), and then he answers to this by explicitly denying responsibility: observation is possible in one direction

only, the narrator's presence is not visible to the characters; hence, the poet is not a real character, as opposed to what can be seen in Mihály Csokonai Vitéz's *Dorottya* [Dorottya]. Denying responsibility is intertwined with a personal confession (that the narrator himself is in love, too). However, this can primarily be regarded as a comic element, since, on the one hand, it does not actually explain why the narrator dos not intervene, and, on the other hand, while he states twice in a row that he is in love, there is no additional information concerning this love either in previous or subsequent parts of the text. The letter appears in Canto VII again (lines 802–819), when Ferkó's wife, Katalin, receives and reads it: the narrator explains this unfortunate event by saying that this is what usually happens in novels, and that his own experience is the same. In this way, he again denies responsibility for providing a story that may eventually be unpleasant for the reader (see especially lines 833–839).

In sum, it can be concluded that Ferenc Juhász's *A jégvirág kakasa* exhibits various narrative properties that can be observed in earlier mock epics and verse novels as well. Reflections on the extradiegetic level and especially intertextuality are less dominant than in prototypical verse novels, and there are several features that are characteristic of mock epics (as the way proposition is treated), which brings the text closer to the genre of the mock epic. Hence, the genre designation of a mock epic is justifiable from a narratological perspective, too. At the same time, the narrator's presence and his interaction with the reader via an emphatically written text are traits not characteristic of the Hungarian mock-epic tradition preceding verse novels (see Chapter 4 of the present dissertation).

This seems to indicate that the Hungarian verse novel cannot be simply treated as a special literary phenomenon of the end of the 19th century, as it had an impact on Hungarian narrative poetry well beyond its actual appearance. Regarding its effect in literary history, however, it is important to take into consideration that *A jégvirág kakasa* is not a central work of Hungarian literature in the 20th century (or in the middle of the 20th century), and neither Ferenc Juhász's epic poetry nor Hungarian epic poetry in general follows this direction. Applying the form of the mock epic is primarily a comic device for Ferenc Juhász, yet in a more indirect way than in mock epics of the 18th and 19th centuries. In the case of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz and Sándor Petőfi, the mock epic fulfilled its authentic role: imitating the form of the classic epic, they depicted rather banal events, thereby causing a discrepancy between form and content and achieving a comic effect. However, the mock epic is anachronistic in the 20th century. Hence, in the case of Ferenc Juhász, not so much the epic but rather the mock epic is imitated: the text evokes the relevant literary tradition in several features and in its language; yet the story and many points in it (and even the fact that the narrator smokes cigarettes) are in contrast with the period evoked by the form. In other words, discrepancy is given for modern literature not only in the case of the epic but also in

the case of the mock epic. At the same time, imitating the mock epic as an archaic form enables the emergence of a modern mock epic, which hence reflects on its antecedent – see, for instance, the mottos taken from Sándor Petőfi's *A helység kalapácsa* [The Hammer of the Village]. Hence, in the case of the mock epic, a kind of reflection affecting a generic level can be detected, and the question is whether a similar one can be observed in the case of the verse novel.

6.3 The postmodern Hungarian verse novel

At the end of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, there are again texts appearing in Hungarian literature that can be considered verse novels in the sense of the narratological definition pursued in the present dissertation, as well as other texts belonging to narrative poetry that can be related to the verse novel. It is important to stress that this particular group of texts is by no means homogeneous; yet even texts that can only marginally be classified as verse novels are crucial because they contribute to the establishment of epic poetry in postmodern literature, hence indirectly fostering the embedding of verse novels in a wider literary context.

The first example of the postmodern Hungarian verse novel is János Térey's *Paulus* [Paulus] from 2001; Térey has two more works that can be considered as verse novels: *Protokoll* [Protocol] from 2010, and its continuation *A Legkisebb Jégkorszak* [The Littlest Ice Age] from 2015. It is worth mentioning that Térey's volume of short stories *Átkelés Budapesten* [Crossing Budapest] from 2014 contains short stories written in verse. Balázs Szálinger has two texts belonging here: *Zalai Passió* [The Passion of Zala] from 2000 and *A százegyedik év* [The Hundred and First Year] from 2008. In addition, without being exhaustive, I would like to mention the following texts: Dániel Varró's *Túl a Maszat-hegyen* [Beyond Mountain Smut] from 2003, István Vörös's *Heidegger, a postahivatalnok* [Heidegger, the Post-Officer] from 2008, Gábor Schein's *Bolondok tornya* [Tower of Fools] from 2008, and István Géher's *Polgár Istók* [Stephen the Bourgeois] from 2008.

6.3.1 Balázs Szálinger

Balázs Szálinger's *Zalai Passió* [The Passion of Zala] is primarily related to the mock-epic tradition. While it appeared earlier than János Térey's *Paulus* [Paulus], the reminiscence of the verse novel as a genre is not tied to this text, which had a lesser impact than *Paulus*. Yet it is important to stress that several characteristics of *Zalai*

Passió make the text more similar to the verse novel: for instance, the narrator is foregrounded already in the introduction. On the one hand, it becomes clear that, being also from the county of Zala, he takes up "*the hard role of the first Hungarian Zala-revisionist poet*" (Hungarian: "*az első magyar zalai-revizionista költő nehéz szerepét*"); on the other hand, the hero of the poem is his own grandfather, István Kolon.[44] Choosing a not very distant ancestor as hero can also be observed in the verse novel *Legendák a nagyapámról* [About my Grandfather] by József Kiss (see the relevant sections of Chapter 2). Moreover, this feature is connected with the classical epic tradition as well, as for instance Miklós Zrínyi chose his great-grandfather to be the hero of his *Szigeti veszedelem* [The Siege of Sziget] in the 17th century. Reference to the epic tradition can of course be detected in that several elements of the text imitate the structure of the classic epic in a way similar to what is characteristic of the mock epic: for instance, the introductory part called "First bundle of lines" (Hungarian: "Első sornyaláb") contains an invocation and a proposition.

At the same time, reflections on the text are not dominant and they primarily appear in the short summaries before the individual cantos rather than in the text written in verse. For instance, the summary of Canto I is as follows:

> melyben a zalai költő elfogulatlanul tárja elénk
> a történeti előzményeket, s bár ezen előzmények taglalása
> aztán egyre kevésbé lesz elfogulatlan,
> a súlyos tényeken mindez vajmi keveset változtat
>
> *in which the poet from Zala impartially reveals us*
> *the historical antecedents, and though the discussion of these antecedents*
> *will become less and less impartial,*
> *this does not alt*er the grave facts
>
> (Balázs Szálinger, *Zalai Passió*, Canto I, summary)

The ironic presentation of the narrator's impartiality reappears frequently at the beginning of the subsequent cantos as well; by stressing this point, the focus of the summary shifts from the topic of the text to follow (diegetic level) to its formal properties (extradiegetic level). However, partiality does not involve the narrator personally stepping forward in any part of the text. It rather means that he unambiguously sides with the people of Zala (also referred to as "*Kolonese*", Hungarian "*kolonéz*", see

[44] The family name of the hero is a character-revealing name: Kolon was the original name of the county in the administrative division of the Hungarian Kingdom in the first half of the 11th century (under Stephen I), named after its original centre Kolon. The centre was moved to Zala already at the end of the 11th century and the county was renamed accordingly. The choice of the name gives the hero a mock-authentic and mock-revisionist flavour, and as such it is one of the most important ironic/parodistic devices of the text.

the footnote above concerning the hero's name) in their conflict with the people of the industrial county Veszprém, constantly portraying the latter to be negative in all possible respects. His own person gains textual presence only in relation to his grandfather, in that he refers to István Kolon as his valiant grandfather; however, apart from this, he does not say anything either about himself or about his family. The closing part called "The last bundle of lines" (Hungarian: "A végső sornyaláb") is an exception inasmuch as the narrator provides an ironic vision of his own fate as a poet and of his death:

> Érzem, tájszó kellene mostan. Vérezem immár,
> mint elhasznált vátesz, lángoszlop, ha az új föld
> végül megfelel és bő túrón tartja a népet.
>
> *I can feel that dialect speech would be needed now. I am already bleeding*
> *like a used prophet, a pillar of fire, when the new land*
> *is ultimately suitable and provides the people with plenty of cheese.*
>
> (Balázs Szálinger, *Zalai Passió*, A végső sornyaláb [The last bundle of lines], lines 1–3)

At the same time, neither the cited part above nor what follows can be considered examples of truly personal appearances of the narrator: they rather serve to deconstruct a traditional, predominantly 19th-century role of the poet. This essentially holds for the part called Appendix (Hungarian: Függelék), in which the summary indicates that the narrator will defend his text; what in fact happens, however, is that the narrator plays with the various roles of the poet, and neither the accusers nor the poet are specified. In sum, the importance of *Zalai Passió* with respect to the verse novel lies in its quality of resurrecting a tradition of comical narrative poetry that reflects on the existing literary tradition and, to a lesser extent, on its own formal properties. This of course partly holds for Ferenc Juhász's *A jégvirág kakasa* [The Rooster of the Frostwork] as well, yet *Zalai Passió* is a postmodern text and its impact on contemporary verse novels is definitely more significant.

Szálinger's other text, entitled *A századegyedik év* [The Hundred and First Year], is related to the verse novel primarily because of its topic and not due to its formal properties. The hero, Hahóthy, is a young spokesman of a town hall, who, while relating to his work in a cynical way to some extent, keeps up the illusion of being able to build up his career. However, he in fact prepares his own downfall by not recognising traps when he agrees to take part in the construction of the new town hall building. His failure in building up a successful career (and more generally, his life)

can partly be attributed to his own clumsiness, and partly of course to the fact that the hero becomes an instrument used by others: this scenario is known from 19th-century verse novels, too. However, apart from these similarities, the text is not characterised by reflexivity or by the foregrounding of the narrator.

6.3.2 János Térey

János Térey's *Protokoll* [Protocol] is similar to Balázs Szálinger's *A százegyedik év* [The Hundred and First Year], as the narrator's function is reduced to telling the story, while he does not step forward personally. At the same time, the hero, chief of protocol Ágoston Mátrai, appears already at the beginning of the text as a rather disillusioned person, who later misses all the opportunities of potential happiness precisely due to his cynicism; in this respect, he is similar to the "superfluous" type of disillusioned heroes in 19th-century verse novels. The structure of the text is reminiscent of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, especially in terms of the various (potential) love stories. Mátrai is important for several women (Blanka, Dorka, Fruzsina), but he does not value enough any of the possibilities in his dominant position. When he, after all, tries to re-establish these connections, he has to face the fact that the women have moved on, and their dominance is not due to abusing their power over him but simply due to their ability to organise their lives without Mátrai. Hence, the Onegin-story is reflected on via multiple mirroring, and none of the narrative threads can be regarded as a full paraphrase; paraphrase rather meaning that the original narrative is split into multiple stories that remain sketched to varying degrees.

In Térey's *Paulus* [Paulus], there are three parallel narratives, from which only one (the story of the IT-expert Pál) can be regarded as a paraphrase of Onegin's story, while the other two (the story of the field marshal Friedrich Paulus and that of Saint Paul) cannot. The three threads interpret each other (Margócsy 2002): in all the three, the hero's moral choice is foregrounded, and all heroes take up a pre-given role whose acceptance involves the complete or partial dissolution of the individual.

The story of Saint Paul is constantly reflected on in the text but is not assigned any chapter of its own. The mottos placed at the beginning of the individual chapters are in many cases quotes from the Bible unambiguously related to Saint Paul (the mottos of Chapters II and VI include quotes from Saint Paul's letters, the mottos of Chapter VII include a quote from the Acts of the Apostles). In comparison, the textual presence of Friedrich Paulus is much more dominant, since he is the protagonist of three chapters (III, V and VII) from a total of nine chapters: at the same time, these parts of the text are embedded in the story of the IT-expert Pál, which is true on the compositional level, too. The story of Friedrich Paulus not only interprets

Pál's story from inside but is present on a higher reflexive level as well at the very beginning already: one of the mottos is from Friedrich Paulus. This (*Ich stehe hier auf Befehl!* 'I am standing here on command!') paraphrases the other one (*Ich stehe hier, und kann nicht anders.* 'Here I stand. I can do no other.'), which is attributed to Luther (but is in fact not a verbatim quotation from Luther). In this way, the divine and the military command interpret each other, and the two are synthetised by the narrator at the end of the text (Margócsy 2002):

Három ízben, három csapáson
Indult háromszor misszió!
Igazulásom várva várom,
S hitújoncként tengődni jó.
Ha természetes közegében
Maradna, elfonnyadna tétlen:
Várományosa mennyei
Honornak, bízvást megleli
Damaszkuszát a férfi, meglásd.
Célállomás! Pompás iram.
Szózata tetszésemre van:
„Itt állok és nem tehetek mást.
Míg rám erős Uram tekint,
Itt állok őrt, parancs szerint."

Three times, following three paths
Did three missions start!
I am eagerly waiting for my redemption,
And rubbing along as a neophyte is good.
If he were to stay in his natural
Environment, he would wither being idle:
He is an expectant of celestial
Honour, a man will surely find his
Damascus, you will see.
Destination! Splendid speed.
His speech pleases me:
"Here I stand and can do no other.
Till my mighty Lord beholds me,
Here I stand guard, on command."

(János Térey, *Paulus*, Canto IX, stanza 56)

Following an external command, both Saint Paul and Friedrich Paulus are forced into a given system, which, however, they can also form to some extent, primarily via their general behaviour. Saint Paul is a pioneer (and martyr) in the process of Christianity becoming a world religion. Friedrich Paulus sets an example by his firmness (since he knows that he cannot win) and becomes a critic of the system, as he considers the National Socialist machinery of the state to be his real enemy, which has sent him to war and which then does not help him out. Synthetising his previous life and turning radically against it result in the motif of turnaround following the scheme of Saint Paul's turnaround, the motif being present in all the three stories and highlighted as being a shared moment of key importance by the narrator (see Chapter IX, stanza 54).

The system discussed above is true for Pál only to a certain degree. His system is the computer, but he shapes this system already at the beginning (hence, independently of the moment of turnaround) as he is a programmer who not only operates as a system administrator but also as a hacker who constantly questions the validity of his self-built system. On the one hand, the continuous dichotomy of building and destroying is a playful gesture from Pál's part; on the other hand, he becomes a victim of this game, in that several of his decisions are inconsistent and hasty (cf. Margócsy 2002), which applies to the way he handles his personal relationships as well. The only real turn is at the same time fatal. In the last chapter, Pál decides for the final demolishment of the system when he binds his own life to a building in Königsberg that is likewise to be demolished; more precisely, it is to be demolished via implosion: he sneaks into the building at the very last minute and , hence, blown up as well. As Margócsy (2002) points out, the synthesis of the three rather different stories and their reflections on each other result in an encyclopaedic character of *Paulus* not only in the way it can be observed in Pushkin but also in a way that ironically relates to this overarching character of verse novels.

The love story, reflecting on the Onegin-story, is also characterised by disintegration. Pál meets Ludovika early in the morning: she is waiting for a taxi in front of the Opera House in Budapest, while he is sitting on one of the sphinxes of the building drunk. Their meeting is thus an ironic answer to the 19th-century tradition shown by *Eugene Onegin* and by László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages]:

> Pál – *free styler* az utcaszinten –
> Észreveszi a ritka nőt.
> Mint Liv Tyler az *Anyegin*ben:
> Ontja a kéregmélyi hőt,
> Izzás és bálias pirosság.
> Ím, a testet öltött bizonyság:
> Az élet él, élni akar,

Bővített kiadást takar
A rókaprém s a perzsabunda.
Pál hagyja kedves szfinxeit,
Posztjáról lekecmeredik,
És kisvártatva orra bukna,
Ha nem fogná föl most a nő.
Hat óra. Első próbakő.

Pál – a free styler *on the street level –*
Beholds the rare woman.
Like Liv Tyler in Onegin*:*
She radiates magmatic heat,
Glow and the redness of a dancing ball.
Lo, the embodiment of the evidence:
Life lives, wants to live,
The fox stole and the fur coat
Cover an extended edition.
Pál leaves his dear sphynxes,
He climbs down from his post,
And would soon fall on his face
If she didn't grasp him now.
Six o'clock. The first trial.

(János Térey, *Paulus*, Chapter II, stanza 66)

The quotation above explicitly alludes to *Onegin*; however, the reference to Pushkin's text is only indirect since the narrator refers to a film version in the simile. In this way, a move towards popular culture can also be observed, which matches the general closeness of the text to colloquial language.

However, Ludovika is already married and has a child as well. She is elder than Pál, hence the original arrangement of roles (which is in this respect kept in *A délibábok hőse*) is turned over; in line with this, Ludovika's original aim is a one-night stand with Pál, which does indeed take place. Ludovika falls in love with Pál: similarly to Tatiana, she writes a letter, and she does so by embedding it in a virus, thereby modifying the original scheme (Chapter IV). On the one hand, she adopts Pál's programming language; on the other hand, this is essentially the only instance where a destructive power appears in Pál's system that was not generated by himself (for testing the system). Hence, the innovative gesture of breaking with traditions (and traditional forms) manifests itself in Ludovika, similarly to Tatiana, but of

course tailored to the postmodern world and the particular relationship. The rejection by Pál follows (Chapter VI): he is ruder than Onegin, and his dominance does not follow from him being an elder, more experienced man – on the contrary, he is younger and assumes himself superior, and he ruthlessly mocks Ludovika's age and sexual appetite. However, Pál later (still in Chapter VI) changes his mind and writes a traditional letter, since "*he does not trust the machine*" (stanza 43; Hungarian: "*a gépben nincs bizalma*"). Hence, he leaves the system he knows well for Ludovika, indicating that the problem cannot be solved within the same.

Ludovika rejects Pál just as Tatiana does Onegin; however, while Tatiana still loves Onegin and rejects him only because she fulfils her duty as a wife, Ludovika is active in choosing (back) her role as a wife. She describes her breaking away from Pál as a process of healing (note that she is a psychiatrist):

A tüneteket ecseteljem?
Mondjak farmakológiát?
Tablettánként hogyan növeltem
A lélek tiszta dózisát?
Bámulva a selyemtapétát,
Hogy pártolt el tőlem az étvágy?
Mit betegnek rendelt a vény,
Ugyanazt zabálhattam én,
Hála neked, Pál. Épp elég volt.
Kimondtad Filemon nevét,
S én megtértem, mint hű cseléd,
Feledve az egyéji tébolyt,
S megérkeztem: haza.
Ahová te nem fogsz soha.

Shall I depict the symptoms?
Shall I talk about the pharmacology?
How I increased the pure dose of
The soul, pill for pill?
Staring at the silk wallpaper,
How appetite left me?
I had to eat exactly
What the prescription ordered for the patient,
Thanks to you, Pál. It was well enough.
You uttered Filemon's name,

And I returned, as a faithful servant,
Forgetting the frenzy of one night,
And I arrived: home.
Where you never will.

(János Térey, *Paulus*, Chapter VIII, stanza 32)

In the next stanza, Ludovika hints at some remaining feelings ("*I will harden my heart*" – Hungarian: "*megkeményítem szivem*"); yet she rejects Pál even more vigorously ("*you can fuck off*" – Hungarian: "*elmehetsz a vérbe*", literally 'you can go to the blood'). Ludovika's forceful reaction and her register not only deconstruct the role that Pál tried to assign her within his own system but also the one she inherited from Tatiana via literary tradition.

Apart from the allusions to the Onegin-story, *Paulus* is closer to prototypical verse novels than *Protokoll* is because the narrator's presence is more marked, and he reflects on his text at several points. This includes reflections on the structure, as in the opening of the "Eastern front" at the beginning of Chapter III, where he starts the story of Friedrich Paulus, or as at the end of the text, where he merges the stories of the three Pauls. His relationship to the characters is reminiscent of *Eugene Onegin*: he is critical towards Pál, but he also sympathises with him, and he hints at certain characteristics shared by them (moreover, he recalls his own disappointment in love in Chapter VIII just before Ludovika rejects Pál). On the other hand, Ludovika is a sort of female ideal for him, whom he takes leave from separately at the end of the text (Chapter IX, stanza 55), and whose letter is in his possession (see Chapter IV, stanza 40).

Considering all this, *Paulus* is a truly postmodern verse novel in a reflexive relationship with its own generic antecedents, thus making the 19th-century verse novel a generic antecedent (for the verse novel at the end of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century). In other words, the verse novel at this point not only shows reflexivity on the level of the individual texts but it also considers itself a literary antecedent. This was to some extent true of the way the 19th-century Hungarian verse novel, following the works of Byron and Pushkin, gave rise to the notion of the verse novel as a cross-cultural genre (see Chapters 2 and 4). However, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, 19th-century verse novels are antecedents in terms of literary history (to be distinguished from contemporary literary antecedents), and they are paraphrased by postmodern verse novels in the same way the 19th-century verse novel paraphrased, for instance, the epic (cf. Bacskai-Atkari 2014). At the same time, the central text of this generic tradition is *Eugene Onegin*; hence, the cross-cultural dimension and orientation largely remain. The backgrounding of the Hungarian texts can primarily be explained by the fact that the 19th-century Hungarian verse novel has barely been canonised. By contrast, the cultural embeddedness of *Eugene Onegin* is considerably

wider: apart from various film versions, Tchaikovsky's opera, as well as several ballet adaptations, should be mentioned. Finally, *Eugene Onegin* is part of the Hungarian secondary school curriculum (while Hungarian verse novels are not), which makes Pushkin's text more canonised and more readily available for Hungarian readers.

6.3.3 Paraphrase – Varró, Géher, Térey

The distinguished role of *Eugene Onegin* is reflected in Dániel Varró's verse novel (more precisely, a verse fairy-tale novel) *Túl a Maszat-hegyen* [Beyond Mountain Smut], too, which, just like János Térey's *Paulus* [Paulus], contains several intertextual references. Tatiana's letter is evoked as well when the heroine, Janka Maszat (literally: 'Janka Smut') receives a letter (an email) from an anonymous benefactor, who ends the same in the following way:

> Ki téged évek óta kímélt.
> Janka, én írok neked emailt.
> Kell több? Nem mond ez eleget?
> Te jónak születtél, nemesnek.
> Ne félj, bántódásod nem eshet.
> A megváltás már közeleg.
>
> *Who has spared you for years.*
> *Janka, I am writing you an email.*
> *What more is needed? Does this not say enough?*
> *You were born to be good and noble.*
> *Do not fear, you cannot be harmed.*
> *Salvation is approaching.*
>
> (Dániel Varró, *Túl a Maszat-hegyen*, Chapter VII, part 11, lines 23–28)

The closing of the letter (and to some extent its preceding parts) unambiguously evokes the beginning of Tatiana's letter, which is thus placed into an ironic context since, on the one hand, Janka does not receive a love letter, and, on the other hand, she cannot decipher any useful piece of information. This is so because the sender does not reveal her/his identity and acknowledges that she/he must keep certain details secret; hence, the letter itself is nothing more than a general warning that Janka should not trust anyone. Viewed in this light, the third line of the quotation above is highly ironic for the reader.

The reference to *Eugene Onegin* is indirect in one of the mottos of Canto IX, which is taken from Térey's *Paulus*, from the beginning of Ludovika's letter. The beginning of her letter is unambiguously a paraphrase of Tatiana's letter (note that Varró quotes only the first three lines):

> Feltörve céges aknazárat,
> Elcsenvén forráskódokat –
> Én postázok vírust magának,
> Legyek mátrixban boldogabb.
>
> *Breaking a corporate barrage,*
> *Having stolen source codes –*
> *I am sending a virus to you,*
> *Let me be happier in the matrix.*
>
> (János Térey, *Paulus*, Chapter IV, Ludovika levele Paulushoz [Ludovika's letter to Paulus], lines 1–4)

Naturally, the original *Eugene Onegin* is recognisable already; yet Varró's text again uses it in a different context, since the motif of an email containing a virus (and not a love story) will be important in Canto XI. At the same time, quoting from *Paulus* establishes an active relationship between contemporary Hungarian verse novels; moreover, it is an instance of an almost immediate literary response (*Paulus* was published in 2001, *Túl a Maszat-hegyen* in 2003). In this respect, it is especially interesting that a relatively early analysis of *Túl a Maszat-hegyen* appeared in the journal *Tiszatáj* in 2004, as part of the column "Kritika" [Critiques]. The text was written by Andrea Lovász and is entitled *A költészet kaptatóin* [On the Ascents of Poetry]. It is a literal response as it is written in verse and it evokes the verse novel specifically: it is divided into chapters as well as into a prelude (Hungarian: "előhang") and an epilogue (Hungarian: "utóhang"), and the text establishes a dialogical relationship with the reader; as such, it can be regarded as a sort of mini verse novel. It is namely a verse novel whose topic is a specific verse novel on the one hand and its classification on the other hand. According to Lovász (2004: 98), *Túl a Maszat-hegyen* is much more a verse novel than a fairy tale novel, not in the least because the (linear) structure of the tales is constantly interrupted and deconstructed by the narrator's remarks. This naturally follows directly from the fact that the text has a self-reflexive structure, similarly to its generic antecedents.

However, it is also possible for contemporary Hungarian verse novels to refer to 19th-century Hungarian verse novels: this can be observed, for instance, in István Géher's *Polgár Istók* [Stephen the Bourgeois], which is a sort of paraphrase of János

Arany's *Bolond Istók* [Stephen the Fool]: it constantly evokes its literary antecedent and contains, just like its antecedent, several self-reflexive gestures. Importantly, however, the two texts differ in terms of the narrator-hero relationship. In Arany's work, the narrator and the hero, Istók, are two separate characters (following the prototypical constellation of verse novels). In *Polgár Istók*, the hero, Istók, is an alter ego of the narrator: he can thus be regarded as the vehicle of the narrator's textual self-representation, and there is no way to identify two separate characters (see, for instance, stanza 82). Hence, Istók is supposed to be a medium through which the narrator can relate the story of his life in third person; yet the propositions involving a third-person subject repeatedly change into ones involving a first-person subject, and the narrator steps forward from behind his own mask, often with strong emotions.

Apart from all this, reflexivity is repressed by the lack of a true narrative. The story of Istók (ultimately, that of the narrator) does not fully develop, and what we have at hand is rather the possibility of telling a story, which the narrator appears to start from time to time; yet he always arrives at the conclusion that his quest is pointless. In this way, the narrative (which has never developed fully) is interrupted, partly because the narrator does not touch the text for years (see, for instance, stanzas 25 and 33). Yet the lack of narration is tied to the lack of various events in the story; that is, the narrator creates the impression that the events take place at their own speed in an unstoppable way while narration is interrupted.

The text consists of a single canto, which is, however, referred to as Canto I, indicating the theoretical possibility of a continuation, but the closing gesture (stanza 93) can rather be interpreted as its rejection. In sum, *Polgár Istók* is a postmodern verse novel, presenting one of the major topics regarding the question of the feasibility of the verse novel; contraty to Térey's *Paulus*, the answer to this question is negative.

6.3.4 Footnotes –Gábor Schein, János Térey

In connection with János Térey's *Paulus* [Paulus], the role of the author-narrator's footnotes must also be addressed. These properties reinforced the reflexivity of the text and its playfulness in the reader's direction already in Byron's *Childe Harold* and in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, and as demonstrated in Chapter 4, this tradition has its roots in the Hungarian mock epic tradition, too. The footnotes in *Paulus* are chiefly explanations, mostly devoted to phenomena of cultural history, and to a minor extent representing cases of word explanations. Apart from this, there are some stanzas that are claimed to have been left out of the main text; hence, the entire text strongly aims at presenting itself as edited, inasmuch as it features not only various

layers (main text versus footnotes) but also versions that differ in terms of their history (original versus revised). However, several footnotes are little informative for the reader in terms of understanding the text, which is why these notes function rather as narrative games and serve to foreground the figure of the author. This is exemplified by gestures referring to the circumstances of writing. In Chapter III, for instance, the footnote written to Paulus's cavatina (between stanzas 50 and 51) states that the author wrote this part of the text in Vág street "*with a drunken head*" (Hungarian: "*boros fejjel*"), see footnote 32.

The distinguished role of footnotes can be observed in Gábor Schein's Bolondok *tornya* [Tower of Fools], too. The author-narrator steps forward actually only here: the main text is dialogical, and the story can be recovered from the dialogue between the two protagonists, Robert Nador ("Bob", a 20th-century neurologist) and Bernardo (Canaletto): Nador takes Bernardo along on a time journey during which other characters join the dialogue, too. The events and the text are essentially steered by Nador, several remarks of whom are not only commented on but also corrected by the author appearing in the footnote, who also provides additional information concerning the characters and the places and figures they encounter. Many of these footnotes are indeed informative for the reader in the same way as was seen for the verse novel (and the mock epic) in general, while in several cases, the aim is rather the creation of a dialogical relationship with the main text. This is exemplified by the footnote written to line 11 of the chapter entitled *Budapest, egy levél* [Budapest, a letter], where Robert Nador makes a quasi-historical reference in the text. In that connection, the footnote says the following:

> Robert Nador e célzása számunka homályos. Nem kívánunk vele kapcsolatban találgatásokba bocsátkozni.
>
> *This hint by Robert Nador is vague for us. We do not wish to speculate about it.*
>
> (Gábor Schein, *Bolondok tornya*, Budapest, egy levél [Budapest, a letter], footnote 32)

The voice used in the footnote is unambiguously that of a philologist professionally editing and commenting on the text (an important feature of this is the use of the first person plural even in cases where there is only one author speaking, which is typical of Hungarian academic writing). This philologist here is supposed to distance himself from the opinions expressed in the main text: however, this alienation is not merely an objective statement of the fact that he lacks information, but the aim of disclaiming responsibility can be detected, too. The same can be observed in other footnotes as well; see, for instance, footnote 18 commenting on line 87 of the

chapter *Pirna, bolond festők* [Pirna, foolish painters], where the commentator explicitly argues with a claim made by Robert Nador.

In other cases, the footnotes move further away from the text in terms of their topic and may reflect the personal experiences of the commentator. In lines 119–123 of the chapter entitled *Bécs, önarckép* [Vienna, a Self-Portrait], Nador gives instructions to Bernardo about where to go in Vienna, and part of the itinerary is the fact that "*a Serb sells heavenly roast chicken*" (Hungarian: "*egy szerb isteni sült csirkét árul*") on the Carmelite market; in this connection, the footnote contains the following remark:

> Ezt tanúsíthatom én is. Megkóstoltam a csirkét, valóban finom. A szerbet egyébként Tubicának hívják.
>
> *I can testify this, too. I have tasted the chicken, and it is delicious indeed. The Serb is called Tubica, by the way.*
>
> (Gábor Schein, *Bolondok tornya*, Bécs, önarckép [Vienna, a Self-Portrait], footnote 29)

Highlighting roast chicken is a sort of digression already in the main text from Nador's part, since Bernardo is unlikely to recognise the Carmelite market based on this feature; moreover, Nador actually tells Bernardo not to buy chicken himself. The footnote constitutes an additional digression by the commentator, who at the same time provides an itinerary for the reader. The entire gesture is known from verse novels, as is the dominant, first person singular speech of the commentator.

As can be seen from the investigation above, contemporary Hungarian verse novels are fairly diversified; yet the continuation of the 19th-century verse novel as a genre can be observed in several characteristics. Moreover, generic consciousness is often reflected on, thus making the verse novel self-reflexive on a generic level, too.

6.4 Verse novels in postmodern world literature

Apart from contemporary Hungarian verse novels, it is important to mention that verse narratives can be observed in other literatures as well at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries which can be considered as novels, and which are related to the genre of the verse novel in the Byronic-Pushkinian sense. Even when only considering texts written in English, it is clear that this group is fairly heterogeneous regarding both the theme and the form of the individual texts, see Addison (2009). Without

the aim of being exhaustive, the following examples can be mentioned: *The Golden Gate* (Vikram Seth, 1986), *Akhenaten* (Dorothy Porter, 1992), *Byrne* (Anthony Burgess, 1998), *Happiness* (Frederick Pollack, 1998), *Autobiography of Red* (Anne Carson, 1998), *The Beauty of the Husband* (Anne Carson, 2001). Taking the verse novel in a broader sense, Christoph Ransmayr's 2006 work *Der fliegende Berg* [The Flying Mountain] belongs here as an example of German-language literature.

Choosing verse form is not necessarily related to the verse novel in the Byronic-Pushkinian sense. In his essay *Der Sänger: Zum Erzählen in Strophen* [The Singer: On Narration in Verse], Ransmayr for instance claims to have chosen the verse form for *Der fliegende Berg* primarily because speech in verse evokes the archetypical form of literature, that is, essentially recited poetry: the closest approximate to music is verse and the genre of the ballad. At the same time, verse form for Ransmayr means not so much bound forms (such as blank verse) but rather free verse. As he argues, free verse divides itself along the lines of the melody of the text, which is necessary in the case of recited poetry so that the listeners can follow the narrative on the one hand and the poet can remember the text on the other hand. Evoking the archetypical situation is important in the case of the particular text because the narrated story is based on an archetypical narrative (the story of brothers, a famous one being that of Cain and Abel). Hence, the impact of the verse novel as a genre cannot be detected directly. Yet, as was shown in the previous chapters, the 19th-century verse novel plays a key role in the de-establishment of the dominating canonised genres of verse poetry written in bound, classical forms, and in this way, the verse novel had an indirect role in the appearance of verse narratives as possible unbound forms.

Other postmodern verse novels also suggest that verse form has the role of loosening composition. This is especially true of Anne Carson's texts, in which the sequence of the individual textual units result in a certain kind of narrative. However, considerable parts can only be reconstructed, since the hiatuses between the individual parts are not filled by the narrator, making the entire narrative become fragmented. In *The Beauty of the Husband*, the individual parts are referred to as tangos (as indicated by the subtitle, there are altogether 29 tangos) and the text is referred to as an "essay", which contests Keats's concept of beauty. The text alludes to non-canonical literary forms and foregrounds a literary debate alongside the narration of a story; these properties are well known from verse novels.

At the same time, many postmodern verse novels are explicitly related to the genre of the verse novel. This can be detected in the case of Anthony Burgess's *Byrne* and Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate*, which both evoke the tone of Byron's *Don Juan*, and which adopt prototypical forms of the verse novel: *Byrne* is written in Byronic stanzas and *The Golden Gate* in Onegin-stanzas. The latter shows the cross-cultural dimension of the verse novel, too. As was shown in Chapter 3, the verse novel can

primarily be tied to the inventions of 19th-century English literature (and primarily, of course, to Byron). The text type created by Byron was adopted by Pushkin in Russian literature, who at the same time modified the original form; this modified form was adopted by Seth, writing in English, at the end of the 20th century.

In addition, *Byrne* explicitly reflects on the fact that it should be considered as belonging to the same genre as Byron's verse novel. According to the situation sketched at the beginning of the text, Byrne approaches the author-narrator and pays him to write his biography. The narrator's interpretation (Part I, stanza 2) is that Byrne considers himself a Byronic hero, which is why he wants himself to be immortalised in the Byronic ottava rima form. However, since Byron has been dead for a long time, Byrne is forced to resort to the narrator as an inferior choice to carry out the task. Indeed, *Byrne* is written in ottava rima, and this form naturally establishes a literary connection not only with Byron's texts but also with Ariosto's texts, as hinted at by the narrator. At the same time, the author-narrator makes Byron appear as inferior not only to idealised heroes but also to Byron's Don Juan, complemented by making his poetry appear as inferior to that of Byron.

Apart from the verse novel, the epic tradition can also be evoked in postmodern verse novels in a way similar to what can be observed in 19th-century verse novels; that is, in a mostly ironic way. This is shown by *The Golden Gate*, in which the narrator barely addresses the muse at the beginning of the text (Canto I, stanza 1) and explicitly states that the start of the text should be fast rather than marked, thereby making clear that the role of the muse is secondary. This way of handling the tradition of the invocation can be detected in Byron's work already (see the relevant parts of Chapter 3) as well as the ironic way of presenting the hero and the ironic tone in general.

Naturally, since the individual postmodern verse novels are considerably different from one another, there are several questions and possible generic connections to be investigated, which cannot be addressed in the present dissertation. What is important is that the verse novel in postmodern literature, that it, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, is not restricted to Hungarian literature but it should clearly be treated as a phenomenon of world literature. Hence, just as in the case of 19th-century developments, it can again be said that the verse novel is not only an intertextual but also an intercultural genre.



Conclusion

The present dissertation examined the genre of the 19th-century Hungarian verse novel from a narratological perspective, focussing on the issue of how the genre and its interrelatedness to other genres can be defined based on the narratological properties of texts that qualify as verse novels. Naturally, the analysis was not able to cover several other questions related to the verse novel. At the same time, the ones discussed here are of especial importance, and the proposed analysis can describe the genre of the Hungarian verse novel on narratological and formal, theoretical grounds in a flexible way, as well as its relation towards other genres, and it can incorporate the postmodern revival of the genre. In line with this, the present dissertation reinterpreted the role of this genre in the context of Hungarian literary processes, showing how its status well beyond the particular period in which it was particularly important. Furthermore, by examining the phenomenon with respect to an international background, it also provides an answer for the question to what extent the genre is specific to Hungarian literature.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the major narrative properties of the 19th-century Hungarian verse novel, with the primary goal of providing a largely uniform picture of the rather heterogeneous material constituted by verse novels written in the second half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. Apart from covering common properties, the aim was to allow for the variation observed among the individual texts, and to condition this variation adequately. In addition to presenting the narrative structure characteristic of Hungarian verse novels, I provided arguments in favour of the claim that the generic definition of the verse novel should be based primarily on narratological grounds. When discussing the narratological properties of the verse novel, not so much describe an a priori given genre is described from a specific perspective but rather the essence of the genre is defined, in a strictly descriptive sense. The proposed analysis is adequate for separating texts that can be regarded as verse novels from ones that should be classified as belonging to other genres, and it can relate texts that are marginal from a generic point of view to prototypical texts based on formal criteria.

The examined texts were restricted to verse novels that appeared in large numbers in Hungarian literature in the second half of the 19th-century, such as László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages] and János Arany's *Bolond Istók* [Stephen the Fool]. Although verse narratives attested in previous periods as well, the Byronic-Pushkinian verse novel as a genre is characteristic of this period and primarily of the 1870s. While it has both significant antecedents and later examples, the group of texts in question can still be relatively well defined.

I also pointed out that approaching the generic history of the verse novel is not without problems. On the one hand, due to the lack of strict criteria, the genre is not easy to define: the texts belonging here are undoubtedly written in verse, they have

a narrative character, their topics are primarily related to the contemporary world, and they show several examples of digression from the main story-line. Many topical elements are shared by a number of verse novels; yet these are not restricted to the verse novel but can generally be detected in the literature of the period. One such example from Hungarian literature is the revolution of 1848 (and the following war of independence), a topic which was naturally adapted by lyrical poetry and prose novels (for instance, in the novels by Mór Jókai).

Hence, the fundamental hypothesis of the investigation was that the foregrounding of the narrator is a key property of the Byronic-Pushkinian verse novel, and, in line with this, the narration of the story is backgrounded by a discourse about the story and about the way the story is (or should be) narrated. This is closely related to genre parody as well. The narrator's dominant position enables him to digress extensively, thereby potentially addressing a wide range of topics within a single text. When discussing these issues, I concentrated on how reflections on the diegetic and extradiegetic levels of the text define its structure: on the one hand, I examined to what extent the structure becomes visible; on the other hand, I investigated whether any changes can be observed along the linear procedure of narration.

Regarding the dialogical nature of the text and the thematization of narrative structure, I was also concerned with the question how the properties mentioned above are related to the reader and to the reading process: in several verse novels, the narrator can be observed engaging in a quasi-dialogue with the reader. As was shown, this has many variants, largely depending on the extent to which the reader is personified and specified, and on how the narrator constructs the reader textually; that is, to what degree the readers are assigned a linguistic presence of their own. In addition, dialogues with the reader differ in terms of how specific the reader is: the reader may be general (and, as such, applicable to any actual reader), specified to some degree (for instance, applying only to a group of readers), or maximally specified (for instance, referring to a given person from outside of the text).

Related to these issues, I showed that the reflections in the text and the explicit thematisation of the question of the genre position the given work in an intertextual space. This not only connects the text with other ones (either specified or identified as a group sharing certain features or generic criteria) but it appears as a thematised element in several verse novels, as an integer part of the reflexive narrative structure.

Considering all these questions, in Chapter 2, I proposed a model for describing the narrative structure of the verse novel in which the narrative properties generally attested in verse novels are not merely incremental elements of the text but are inherent, structural features. In my analysis, I argued for four basic types of reflections, which emerge from the matrix defined by two binary features. One feature describes whether reflections target the diegetic or the extradiegetic level of the text;

the other feature describes to what extent the narrator digresses from the story and the properties of the given text.

Reflections on the diegetic level remaining closer to the text cover examples in which the narrator comments on the story or specific events and its characters and expresses his opinion, possibly addressing the reader. Reflections on the diegetic level moving further away from the text include the case of the narrator picking up on a minor point in the story and digressing from the actual storyline.

Reflections on the extradiegetic level target the way the text its formed, including its literary and linguistic properties; when they remain closer to the text, the narrator can be observed explaining his narratological principles (a typical example for this is his tendency to digress extensively) and defending his text against the assumed opinion of the reader. Reflections of the extradiegetic level that move further away from the text are related to the embeddedness of the text in a wider literary context. The prime example for this type is genre parody, although all reflections that compare the given text to other ones belong here, most typically to specific genres and literary tendencies, concerning either earlier literary tradition that counts as classical or the texts by contemporary authors.

Naturally, the distinctions among these four basic types are not sharp, and a given locus of a text may often show a shift from one type to another. At the same time, they provide a flexible framework with the help of which the narrative structure characteristic of the verse novel, and hence ultimately the genre, can be described formally. In addition, this framework not only applies to prototypical verse novels, such as László Arany's *A délibábok hőse* and János Arany's *Bolond Istók*, but it can also relate peripheral examples to the genre, as in the case of János Vajda's *Alfréd regénye* [Alfred's Romance].

Chapter 3 was devoted to Byron's verse novel (or verse novels) and its (English) literary antecedents. It is namely straightforward that the emergence of the verse novel, as known from Hungarian literature, can be traced back to Byron's oeuvre, which makes Byron key importance in understanding the Hungarian verse novel in two respects. On the one hand, Byron is obviously an important antecedent for the Hungarian verse novel (either directly or indirectly), and a closer examination of Byron's texts may reveal differences from the Hungarian texts; hence, ultimately the idiosyncratic properties of the Hungarian verse novel. On the other hand, Byron's works had antecedents as well, and the differences not only describe in what way the verse novel diverges from other genres but they may also reveal what kind of a literary context is necessary/sufficient for the appearance of the verse novel and its eventual spread. Since I applied primarily narratological considerations to define the genre in Chapter 2, I embraced the same approach when examining the questions related to Byron.

In Hungarian literary history, it is an established claim that Byron's *Don Juan* is the first verse novel; this statement raises important questions which would be relevant even if *Don Juan* were not a significant work, simply because it is regarded as the first one of its kind. There are two major perspectives from which its status as the first example is highly relevant; accordingly, the questions that arise fall into two major categories as well.

On the one hand, *Don Juan* is obviously a first example with respect to an existing literary tradition, which is why I examined its antecedents in English literature and the way *Don Juan* – and the verse novel in general – is different from these. In other words, the question is why and from which point it is justified to talk about a truly new genre. Since the verse novel is essentially a hybrid genre, its antecedents cover a wide range, too; yet two fundamental directions can be identified: various genres of narrative poetry (the most important one being the mock epic) and prose novels. Both had a significant tradition in English literature, and both show narrative properties that recur in the verse novel, including *Don Juan*: in the case of the mock epic, the parody of epic conventions is evidently such an example. However, regarding antecedents, not only the preceding literary tradition should be considered but also the more direct precursors, including the works of Byron's contemporaries. It is namely important to examine whether *Don Juan* can be regarded as the first verse novel because it was fundamentally different from the verse narratives written in the period or precisely because it addressed predominantly the same questions but arrived at different conclusions. In this respect, it must alsobe considered how *Don Juan* relates to other verse narratives of Byron: the most important work to be mentioned is *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, which is directly related to the genre of the verse novel in several ways.

On the other hand, as pointed out, treating *Don Juan* as a first example implies some sort of continuation; yet the verse novel as a genre is absent from English literature (except for its revival at the end of the 20th century). In other literatures, texts that can straightforwardly be classified as verse novels from the perspective of world literature appeared due to Byron's impact, but such examples were essentially restricted to a single author in each case (as in Russian literature). Hence, the situation found in Hungarian literature is special in that the verse novel is attested truly as a genre with several examples, and indicating that certain conditions for the establishment of the verse novel were given in Hungarian literature, while the same were apparently absent from English literature.

However, this also means that, considering English literature only, *Don Juan* is not merely the first but also the last verse novel; such a statement is of course paradoxical. That is, while *Don Juan* can naturally be regarded as the first verse novel

from the perspective of Hungarian literature and from the perspective of world literature, it must be tied to some other genre or genres within English literature, to which it is dissimilar insofar as it can be regarded as a markedly different text. While the questions raised above can generally be applied to generic history, I focussed on the narratological aspects of each. When considering the genre of the Hungarian verse novel, as defined along the lines of narratological considerations, the most important issue is how far the narrative structure of *Don Juan* is different from the texts that can be considered its antecedents. Applying a narratological viewpoint is especially important the question why *Don Juan* has no continuation in English literature can be answered based on the structure characteristic of verse novels. It is namely not sufficient to say that Byron became a quasi-diabolical figure in English literature and that the reception of *Don Juan* was not quite positive.

Examining the text of *Don Juan*, in Chapter 3, I showed that the structure established for Hungarian verse novels was present in its entirety in *Don Juan*, too. Taking into account the most important direct antecedents from epic poetry (such as *Childe Harold* and Scott's ballads), it can also be concluded that the novelty of *Don Juan* lies precisely in its special, highly reflexive narrative structure. However, this had no continuation in English literature in the given form, except for certain texts from the 20th and the 21st centuries.

The narrative structure of *Don Juan* is characterised by a high degree of reflexivity, regarding both the diegetic and the extradiegetic levels of the text. Concerning the diegetic level, it should be stressed that the narrator constantly comments on the depicted characters and their actions from the very beginning onwards. This also includes the fact that he chooses Don Juan to be the hero as a last resort; hence, the secondary role of the hero with respect to the narrator is given from the start. Similarly, the narrator digresses from the story quite often: this quality of the text is explicitly regarded as an inherent property of *Don Juan* not only by the later Hungarian verse novels but also by Byron, who thus makes digression be the topic of digression in some cases. This points to the question of reflections affecting the extradiegetic level: the way the text is formed is one of the most important topics of *Don Juan*, which is at the same time an important component in the narrative games targeting the reader (more precisely, targeting a hypothesised audience in most cases). The author-narrator's plans concerning the whole composition are present at various points in *Don Juan*, and he keeps rewriting these plans from time to time. In my analysis, I showed that the properties of the macrostructure of *Don Juan*, such as the opening and closing gestures at the beginning and the ending of the individual cantos, as well as the unfinished ending came to be inherent properties of the genre of the verse novel. That is, they were separated from certain factors that had originally not been parts of the narrative game. Examples for this include Byron's

death in terms of unfinishedness, and the fact that the text was published in sequels in terms of the narrator saying goodbye at the end of certain cantos (even though *Don Juan* already contains gestures of this type that are independent of actual caesuras in publication history). The potential expectations of the reader are frequently projected in the text. This phenomenon is closely related to the type of reflections on the extradiegetic level moving further away from the text, since the expectations can be interpreted along the lines of existing literary conventions; hence, they constitute an important part of the system of intertextual references present in *Don Juan*. Frequently applied forms of this are a debate with contemporary authors, as well as the rejection of certain contemporary literary trends and/or their parody.

The way *Don Juan* explicitly distances itself from contemporary poetry, primarily from epic poetry, is in line with its status in English literature. Accepting the analysis by Fischer (1991), in Chapter 3, I argued that *Don Juan* belongs to the romantic verse narrative in English literature (the designation indicating a wider category than a proper genre), and that this literary ambition essentially aimed at creating a modern equivalent – and a substituting genre – of the classical epic. This endeavour has several representatives, the most important being Sir Walter Scott, and, following him, Byron. Hence, Byron satisfied the needs of the contemporary audience with many of his verse narratives (including *Childe Harold*). However, *Don Juan* is not only a culmination of the romantic verse narrative but also a counterpoint and a deconstructed version thereof, and as such, it constitutes the natural endpoint of the romantic verse narrative in the sense that the phenomenon is not declared a central ambition after Byron. In my analysis, I also showed that the distinguished status of *Don Juan* is predictable based on the narrative properties of the text, since a similarly reflexive structure (which would thematise the generic status of the text) cannot be detected even in the most significant contemporary antecedents, such as *Childe Harold* or Scott's ballads.

Continuing the investigation of the literary antecedents of the verse novel, Chapter 4 discussed the role of the mock epic, primarily concentrating on the question how the examination of the narratological properties of the verse novel and the mock epic may help in distinguishing the two genres on formal grounds. On the one hand, the mock epic is an important antecedent for the verse novel. On the other hand, both genres actively reflect on the epic and mock it; hence, it is not evident to what extent the parody applied by the verse novel is new and what other, primarily narratological properties must be present or absent to make a text either a verse novel or a mock epic. In English literature, the most important author regarding the mock epic is Alexander Pope, who was highly appreciated by Byron, while in Hungarian literature the comical works of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz are potential antecedents. Apart from the presence and the degree of impact, the question arises to what

extent the two genres were perceived as distinct by contemporaries: in English literature, the verse novel as a genre did not arise in the first place; thus, *Don Juan* is often regarded as a mock epic even in contemporary literary criticism. In Hungarian literature, however, the verse novel and the mock epic are treated as distinct genres, and I argued that this differentiation should ultimately be traced back to their distinct narratological properties.

Hence, the relationship between the verse novel and the mock epic is interesting not in the least because of the inherent similarities between the two genres, and separating the two is, apart from theoretical concerns, a crucial issue since the mock epic is also an antecedent for the verse novel. Regarding the differentiation of the two genres on narratological grounds, there is an additional claim at stake for the theory proposed in this dissertation. Namely, if the narrative properties inherently characteristic of the verse novel are indeed suitable for defining the genre on structural grounds, the same properties should either not be present in the mock epic or only to a significantly lower degree.

In my investigation, I focussed on the issue of how reflexive the mock epic is compared to the verse novel, and, related to this, to what extent the narrator becomes prominent. These questions obviously affect both the diegetic and the extradiegetic levels. Regarding the extradiegetic level, the issue of reflections on other genres is raised, too: the mock epic is naturally in constant dialogue with the classical, serious version of the epic. However, this does not necessarily involve explicit reflections as well: the epic is evoked by adhering to or imitating certain formal properties and it is recognised by the readers, especially by contemporary readers who were well acquainted with the epic. In my analysis, I argued that the difference between the verse novel and the mock epic with respect to the classical epic lies in the proportion of mere evocation and explicit reflections, and the way either type is carried out.

Although mock epics are attested both in Hungarian and in English literature, regarding the verse novel it is important to examine how the two literatures differed in terms of the mock epic. This applies to the narrative structure of mock epics on the one hand, and to the embeddedness of these texts in the given literary context on the other hand. Naturally, this raises the question how direct the relationship between mock epics and verse novels is, and whether significant differences between English and Hungarian literature can be detected in this respect.

Since, regarding the English context, the impact of the mock epic (and primarily that of Pope) has been widely examined in the literature, in Chapter 4, I primarily aimed at examining the narrative properties of Hungarian mock epics, discussing the relevant works of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, Sándor Petőfi and János Arany. I

showed that the Hungarian mock-epic tradition is significant in terms of its narrative properties as well; yet the partial presence of the individual features does not constitute a narrative structure analogous to the one attested in verse novels. On the other hand, the mock epic is closely related to the serious epic, and it not only evokes or mocks the latter but also imitates it in terms of its form to a considerable degree, which provides the mock epic with a certain framework. By contrast, verse novels have more freedom in evoking other genres, and discussing the relation to the epic is part of a different framework that is primarily based on reflexivity. Finally, I argued that while the Hungarian mock-epic tradition could have been a more direct antecedent for the verse novel than Pope was for Byron, the differences between the two literatures with respect to the status of the epic led to different outcomes. Contrary to English literature, in Hungarian literature the creation of the national epic was a central ambition even in the 19th century, and this partly blocked the spread of genres deconstructing the epic. At the same time, the importance of the issue contributed to the increased tendency of reflecting on the epic, which fostered the appearance of the verse novel as a genre in the second half of the 19th century.

Apart from the mock epic, other works of narrative poetry should naturally be considered which count as potential internal antecedents of the Hungarian verse novel: this issue was addressed in Chapter 5, primarily concentrating on the properties of 19th-century Hungarian narrative poetry that may have served as antecedents for the narrative structure of the verse novel. On the one hand, the verse novel may have incorporated such properties (possibly also by reflecting on them); on the other hand, antecedents are important because they may have contributed to the narrative structure of verse novels not being alien when they appeared. As was shown in earlier chapters of the dissertation, similar antecedents played a key role in the case of Byron's verse novel. In Chapter 5, therefore, I concentrated on potential antecedents other than the mock epic: in line with the general method applied in the dissertation, I discussed epic poetry, since the extension of the analysis to prose texts (novels, short stories) would have required further investigation. In addition, the scope of my research was narrowed by the fact that I only included some prominent authors and works of 19th-century Hungarian literature, as it would have been impossible to describe the system of literary impacts in its entirety. I primarily examined generic connections whose existence is evident to some degree and can be verified based on the landmark study by Imre (1990), for instance. The importance of my study for literary history is that I concentrated on the narratological aspects of these connections, which so far have been marginal in the literature.

In my analysis, I considered the relevant texts of Sándor Kisfaludy, Mihály Vörösmarty and Sándor Petőfi, and I argued that while many features of the verse novel can be detected in these antecedents, the narrative gestures tied to the notion

of reflexivity do not constitute a system that would make the entire text radically reflexive. In the case of Kisfaludy, the personal tone and the interaction with the reader should be highlighted; in the case of Vörösmarty, a limited amount of reflections can be detected and the narrator often steps forward; yet his narrators, contrary to the verse novel, represent standard poetic roles and modes of expression. As for Petőfi, his narrators are somewhat more personal, but his texts are mostly not reflexive; hence, his role regarding the verse novel can primarily be detected in his tone.

In this sense, the significance of the examples from epic poetry that can be regarded as antecedents of the verse novel, as discussed in Chapter 5, lies in that when the verse novel appeared (primarily following international examples), its narrative structure was not alien to the already existing tradition. Hence, the verse novel could be integrated into the context of Hungarian literature. These antecedents, however, most probably would not have been able to trigger the emergence of the verse novel or similar genres in the 19th century without the impact of international examples and that of the mock epic.

Following the discussion of antecedents, Chapter 6 was devoted to the afterlife of the verse novel; that is, to the question what happened to the verse novel after its emergence in the 19th century. Naturally, this topic is (again) broad, which is why I could not possibly have discussed all its aspects in the present dissertation, thus restricting myself to considering some major points of literary history only. The Hungarian verse novel was characteristic of the second half of the 19th century, and the number of examples continually diminished from the beginning of the 20th century onwards; moreover, these examples were more and more different from prototypical verse novels. In most part of the 20th century, no verse novels are attested, even though certain texts belonging to epic poetry are related to the genre. Finally, the very end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century see the appearance of verse narratives in Hungarian literature that can be regarded as verse novels in the sense of the generic definition based on narrative structure. At the same time, apart from contemporary Hungarian verse novels, verse novels in other literatures should be considered as well, particularly verse novels written in English, showing that the verse novel as a postmodern experiment is not an idiosyncratic property of Hungarian literature.

Hence, Chapter 6 examined what kind of literary tradition postmodern Hungarian verse novels rely on, how significant internal antecedents are (with special focus on the 19th-century verse novel), and to what extent international connections become important. I argued that contemporary verse novels rely on the 19th-century tradition to a significant degree; that is, to its intercultural breadth and not re-

stricted to Hungarian-language texts. Many of the generic connections are established via explicit reflections in the texts; hence, they ultimately stem from the fact that contemporary verse novels regard the 19th-century verse novel a generic antecedent and part of literary tradition. In this sense, the verse novel is a highly reflexive genre not only on the level of the individual texts but also on the generic level.

Regarding epic poetry in the period between the 19th-century Hungarian verse novel and contemporary verse novels, I examined the texts by Lőrinc Szabó and Ágnes Nemes Nagy first. I arrived at the conclusion that a move towards lyric poetry can be observed in the case of both authors, which manifests itself in an egocentric narrator or poetic persona in the case of Lőrinc Szabó and in the backgrounding of the narrator in the case of Ágnes Nemes Nagy. However, these properties stem from certain characteristics of the respective authors' poetry in general and are not specific to these narrative texts. Second, by examining the mock epic by Ferenc Juhász, it is also evident that the impact of the Hungarian mock-epic tradition and partly that of the verse novel can be detected in 20th-century Hungarian poetry as well, yet not as a dominant trend. In this sense, change is truly brought about by the very end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, when several postmodern verse novels appear. As I demonstrated, these relate to the existing tradition of the verse novel in various ways, but the presence of explicit reflections can generally be detected (especially in the case of János Térey's but also in Dániel Varró's and István Géher's works), which unambiguously indicate the active presence of intertextual connections. The 19th-century verse novel can be traced in its impact and may also be reflected on; however, the connections in world literature are even more important, especially Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* (and in some cases its adapted versions from popular culture). On the other hand, intercultural connections are crucial also because postmodern verse novels are attested in other literatures as well, the most important texts being written in English, thereby establishing a systematic continuation of the genre started by Byron within the context of English literature. Considering all factors, the postmodern verse novel, just like its 19th-century predecessor, is both an intertextual and an intercultural genre.

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About the Author

Julia Bacskai-Atkari completed her doctoral studies in literature at the University of Hamburg in 2018. Before that, she earned a doctoral degree in linguistics at the University of Potsdam, where she was subsequently employed as a research fellow and as a leader of her own research project. Currently, she is visiting professor for English Linguistics at the University of Konstanz. Her articles in literary studies on the verse novel, especially on the narrative properties of the genre, have been published in prestigious journals and edited volumes.

Über die Autorin

Julia Bacskai-Atkari hat ihr Promotionsstudium in den Literaturwissenschaften an der Universität Hamburg 2018 abgeschlossen. Zuvor hat sie bereits in den Sprachwissenschaften 2014 an der Universität Potsdam promoviert, wo sie anschließend als wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin und Leiterin ihres eigenen Projekts angestellt war. Derzeit ist sie als Vertretungsprofessorin für Englische Sprachwissenschaft an der Universität Konstanz tätig. Ihre literaturwissenschaftlichen Beiträge über den Versroman, insbesondere über die narrativen Eigenschaften des Genres, wurden in renommierten Zeitschriften und Sammelbänden publiziert.